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truth inside...

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**EXCLUSIVE
REVIEW**

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the sharpest, sexiest shooter in the world

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**GHOST MASTER
EARTH AND BEYOND
FREELANCER
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REVEALED

VIETCONG

The controversial new shooter from
the makers of Hidden & Dangerous

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THE THING

this the last word in survival horror?

COMPO: Who directed The Godfather?




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Child's Play



For an industry that's allegedly worth more than the film business, games are still embarrassingly immature. If you want to find mature content then you'd be better off sticking to the big screen, as the only 'adult' games you're going to find to play with are the equivalent of *Carry On Columbus*.

Why? Is it because computer games are still such a recent phenomenon that they're inextricably linked with a young market? Because that's just plain stupid. Or is it because nobody wants to invest the time and money in creating a game that can seriously engage someone over the age of 16 in an activity other than intense action?

There are a few pioneers, although they haven't always been successful. EA tried to create a brave new vision of gaming with its online project *Majestic*, but ended up losing a lot of money. ("What's *Majestic*?" Exactly.) On the flipside, DMA succeeded in creating a monster with its 18-rated masterpiece *GTA III*, which proves that adult games don't have to consist of nudge-nudge wink-wink-style humour to sell.

We've got another one this month as well. *Mafia*, from Illusion Softworks (creators of the seminal *Hidden & Dangerous*), is an excellent example of a game that's trying to break free from its plastic handcuffs. Taking inspiration from a wide variety of classic gangster movies, it's not exactly *Goodfellas* but it is a step in the right direction. Check out our exclusive review on page 64 for the definitive verdict on another bona fide classic.

And talking about adult content, what about sex? Why have no developers felt brave enough to include a decent representation of the world's favourite activity into a bestseller? And why, when we approached them with the question did they mutter 'no comment' and then refuse to take any of our subsequent calls? You can read the shocking truth in our exposé of sex in games on page 32.

Hope you enjoy the issue. I can't claim that it's better than sex but it's not far off a drunken one-night stand. See you next month.

Dave Woods
Editor



MAFIA P64

THE ULTIMATE GANGSTER
SHOOTER FROM THE MAKERS
OF HIDDEN & DANGEROUS

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■ 8 PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING...

NeoCron, Gore, Medieval: Total War, Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix, Spider-Man: The Movie, Next Generation Tennis, Global Operations Updated Demo, Tomak: Save The Earth

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■ PLUS

All the other latest patches and movies, including a new Essential Patches section and much more

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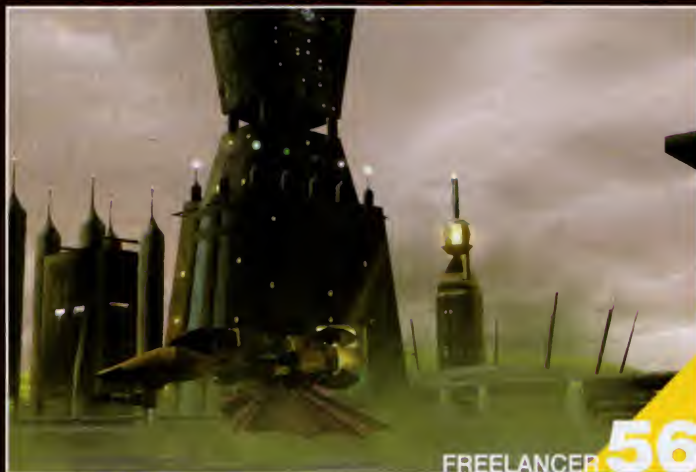


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PCZONE

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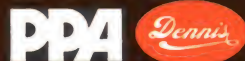
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Gooooood Moorning Vietnam!

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Pterodon/Illusion Softworks

PUBLISHER Take 2

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE October

WEBSITE www.illusionsoftworks.com

IN SUMMARY

A squad-based FPS set in the Vietnamese jungles where you lead an elite team of soldiers through 20 missions and use all manner of realistic weapons, including M16s, grenade launchers and sniper rifles. There will be a developing story and the gameplay will concentrate on clear-headed tactics as much as on bloody action.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

It's the war everyone's been waiting to play from the creative minds behind *Hidden & Dangerous* and, er... *Flying Heroes*. The fact that it's being developed by a Czech company should ensure this isn't some kind of Vietnamese *Soldier Of Fortune*, and the end result will hopefully be more *Platoon* than *Rambo*. Plus the multiplayer mode will allow you to take charge of Vietcong forces against US soldiers.

VIETCONG

War is hell, but this could be one hell of a game

■ SMELLING NAPALM Mark Hill





IT'S BEEN THE subject of mods and a couple of really poor budget releases, but so far Vietnam has been the war no game developer has dared to touch. And you can see why. Americans still have nightmares about it and keep releasing tortured film revisions as a form of mass therapy.

Promisingly, however, *Vietcong* is not being developed in the US, but in that bubbling font of development talent, the Czech Republic. Hopefully this will bring a modicum of impartiality in the way they present the conflict.

The game is a co-production between Illusion Softworks (*Hidden & Dangerous*, *Mafia*) and long-time creative partner Pterodon (*Flying Heroes*). Having seeped themselves in gangster chic for *Mafia* for the last couple of years (see review page 64), Illusion and co are now fully immersed in a bloody catalogue of Vietnam movies. We expect them to draw more on the likes of *Apocalypse Now*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Platoon* rather than *Coming Home* or *Born On The Fourth of July* – although we wouldn't say no to a level where you cruise around

in a wheelchair through violent demonstrations waving antiwar banners.

The action is more likely to be confined to the jungle though, where you'll play as an elite soldier at the head of a team of up to six people, with 20 expansive single-player missions and plenty of mouth-watering multiplayer action. The Pterodon team has created a glorious 3D engine for the project, the Pteroengine, which is pumping out some of the most lush and detailed outdoor environments we've ever seen.

Illusion's choice of subject has caused a massive wave of interest, not least across the Atlantic, where developers have preferred to concentrate their efforts on the wars the US actually won.

Somehow we don't think the fact that you'll be playing the losing side will have that much bearing on the gameplay though. Can you imagine mission objectives such as: "penetrate forest, get you buddies shot and step on a landmine"? Or: "napalm the village where all the enemy's weapons are stored before finding out that it's actually full of Vietnamese schoolchildren"?

"War is NOT fun, but games are. Don't judge our product the same way you judge politics and warfare."

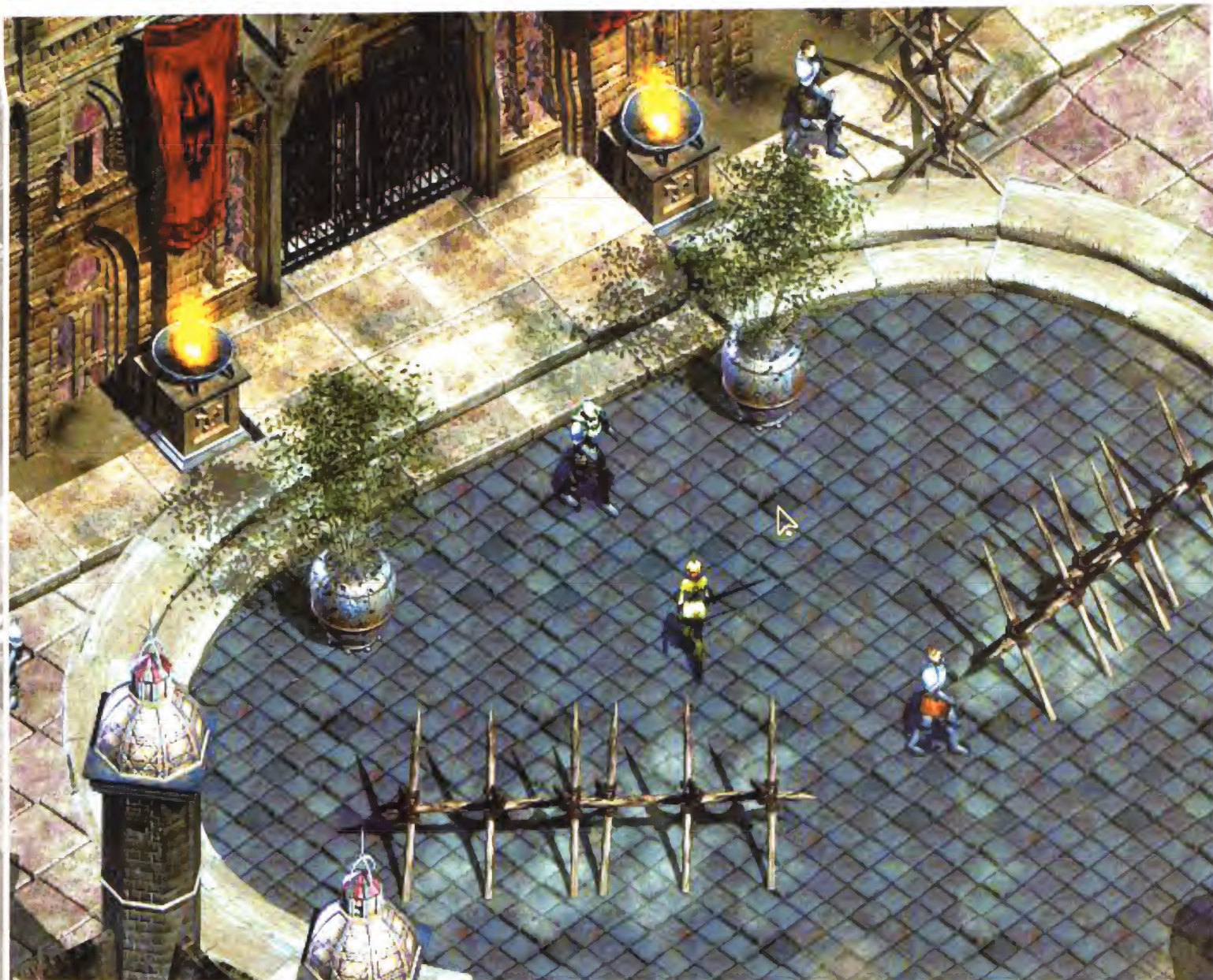
FILIP OSCADAL
LEAD SOUND DESIGNER

We hope they manage to capture some of the disorientation and fear felt by those who took part, although comments from the Pterodon team suggest a rather more light-hearted approach. "We wanted to make an immersive action atmosphere in a tactical co-operative gameplay," says Filip Oscadal, *Vietcong*'s lead sound designer. "War is NOT fun, but games are. Don't judge our product the same way you judge politics and warfare. In fact, VC should be funny and easy to play."

One thing we do know at this stage is that you'll be able to set up ambushes and order air strikes, and it will be interesting to see how this is implemented into the gameplay. Overall, the emphasis is being placed on strategic thinking as well as full-blown action, which should at least ensure this is no brainless shooter.

Vietcong is already at an advanced stage and will probably see the light of day some time before Christmas. **PCZ**





ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Reflexive Entertainment**PUBLISHER** Interplay**EXPECTED RELEASE DATE**

Winter 2002

WEBSITE lionheart.blackisle.com

IN SUMMARY

Black Isle president Feargus Urquhart and his old mate Lars Brubaker, CEO of Reflexive Entertainment, are teaming up on this project, a large-scale traditional RPG set in an alternate history Europe. The massive single-player campaign will take you through 80 levels of smiting and spellcasting, all powered by the well-liked S.P.E.C.I.A.L. role-playing system.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

While Reflexive Entertainment is handling most of the coding duties, the involvement of RPG veterans Black Isle is a good assurance that this will be a rock solid role-player. Fans of *Baldur's Gate* have plenty to get excited about here.

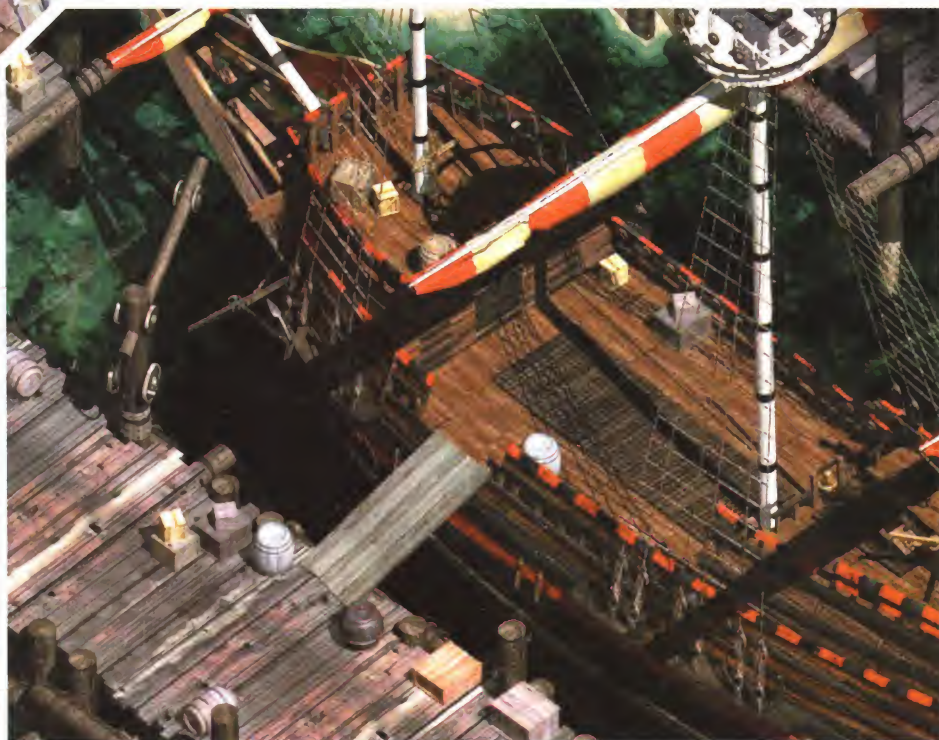
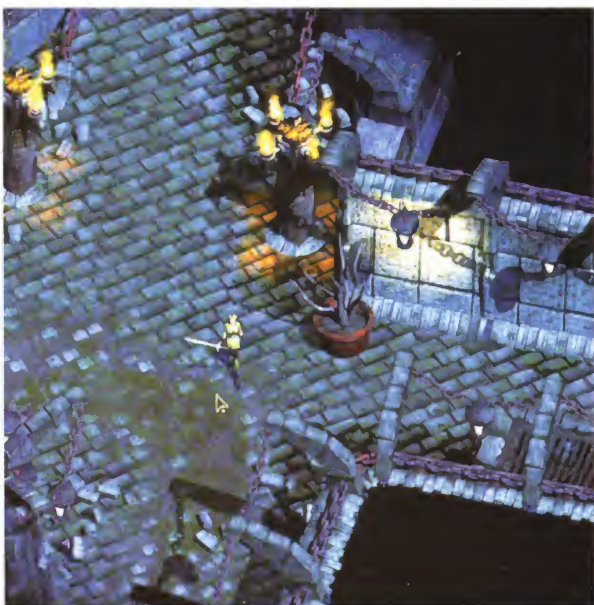
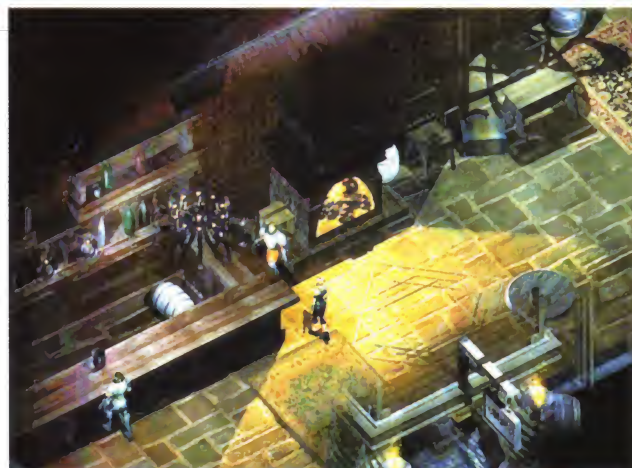
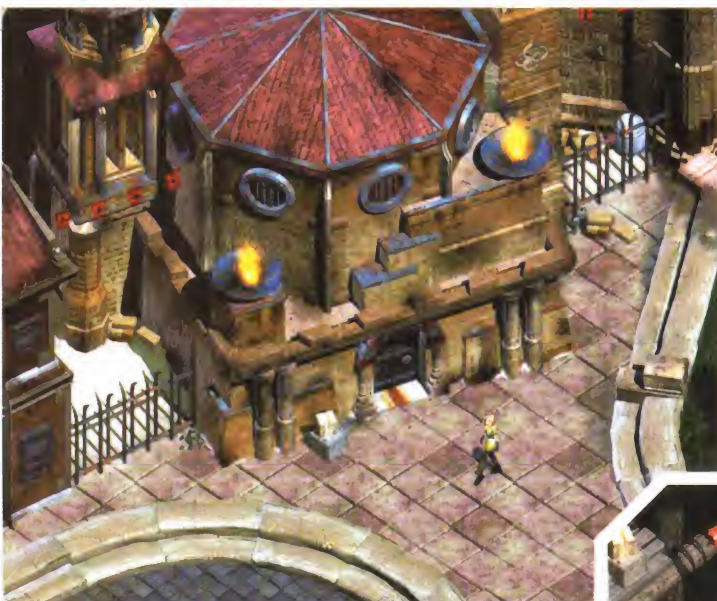


Falling out of time... LIONHEART

A S.P.E.C.I.A.L. take on post 12th century Europe

■ GERBIL-HEARTED Rhianna Pratchett

Lionheart uses the latest version of Reflexive's Velocity engine, used to power *Star Trek: Away Team* among others, which mixes pre-rendered 2D environments with flattened 3D character models. It's not quite *Neverwinter Nights*, but it does the job.



WHAT LOOKS a bit like *Baldur's Gate*, tastes like *Fallout*, and smells like a mouldy banner from the Third Crusade? Give up? Well, other than the mouldy odour, you might be taking an early glance at Reflexive Entertainment's new RPG *Lionheart*. Why, you might ask, would we be interested in a game from the creators of such forgettable outings as *Star Trek: Away Team* and *Zax: The Alien Hunter*? Well, apart from the fact it looks rather pretty, it's mainly because *Lionheart* is being created in conjunction with Black Isle Studios, they of *Planescape: Torment* and *Icwind Dale* fame. And you know that's a good sign.

The game dredges up a spoonful of history beginning just after the 12th century, throws it into a centrifuge, and spins up a bizarre and warped look at the World-of-What-If. What if, in the year 1192, Richard the Lionheart, King of all England, crusaded across Europe, eventually breaking the walls of the Middle Eastern city of Acre while the occupants starved? Oh. He did. So, what if these events precipitated the slaughter of some

3,000 Muslims? Uh, yeah, that too. But what if this slaughter precipitated a ritual known as the Disjunction, which introduced magic to the formerly boring Mediterranean? Aha! At last, fantasy. This event released spirits that eventually spread, invoking hordes of dark creatures and causing large-scale disorder.

Enter the year 1588. The setting: Nueva Barcelona. It is the year of the Spanish Armada, and the Spanish Inquisition is attempting to wipe out all magical elements from the face of the Earth. You are a descendant of the long-gone Richard, attempting to clean up the mess of history with your mysteriously awakening powers.

In a promising move, Black Isle has decided to use a re-jigged version of the S.P.E.C.I.A.L. rule system, from post-apocalyptic role-player *Fallout*, to manage the game. It's a decent system, often admired for its open-ended structure, which eschews player classes in favour of freedom of character development. Since magic was never a part of this system, the developers now have the task of trying to

"The game will have eight major areas over about 80 levels, four player races, zero classes and more than 50 uglies"

work it in, and have come up with a system of three magical disciplines, described as tribal, thought and divine.

In addition, the combat in *Lionheart* is all real-time, so the team has had to jump through a number of hoops to integrate the rule system. Instead of the Action Points of *Fallout*, for example, you'll have an agility stat that relates to your overall speed. And if you're really into stats, here are some more: the game will have eight major areas over about 80 levels, four-player races, zero classes, more than 50 uglies and no less than 30 spells. And for those who whined about *Fallout*'s lack of multiplayer mode, there's now a four-person co-operative game.

It'll be interesting to see how Reflexive fares with an old-skool RPG after its legacy of action titles, but you'll have to wait until later this year before finding out. [E]





ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER IO Interactive

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q1 2003

WEBSITE www.ea.com

IN SUMMARY

It's the new action-adventure from IO Interactive, creators of the *Hitman* series, but instead of a stealth assassin, you play an unassuming yet resourceful blue-collar worker faced with a full-scale Soviet invasion of the USA. Blending elements of first-person action with tactical planning, it's a desperate operation to rid New York of commie scum.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

IO makes cool games – that much we know. But while we still have a soft spot for the original *Hitman*, it's the novel gameplay ideas that really have us intrigued this time. The turn-based sections sound interesting enough, but it also seems that a strong dose of strategy will seep into the FPS side. It could be an intoxicating mix.

Better dead than red...

FREEDOM: THE BATTLE FOR LIBERTY ISLAND

Terror and sabotage are your friends as you lead urban guerillas in the streets of New York City

■ UNDER THE YOKE Anthony Holden



The game is currently being shown off in its third-person guise, although we've been promised that the default view will be first-person by the time it hits your screen.



OK, WHO REMEMBERS *Red Dawn* then? The mid-'80s Cold War paranoia flick starring Patrick Swayze and Charlie Sheen? You know, the one where a bunch of plucky teenagers have to save the USA from an invading Soviet army hell-bent on enslaving the decadent capitalist pig-dog and replacing every MacDonald's sign in sight with a hammer and sickle? It's had videogame potential written all over it for years, and it's bordering on criminal that it's taken until now for someone to recognise this.

Freedom: The Battle For Liberty Island [working title] may not be formally related to the big-screen classic, but it does take Soviet invasion as its basic premise, and does put you in the shoes of a Swayze-esque everyman leading a team of motley freedom fighters against an occupying force on Uncle Sam's soil. A nuclear missile has taken out the US capital, offing the President in the process, and giving the commies free reign to send in the troops. Thousands of citizens have been rounded up and imprisoned, including your own brother. Needless to say, and


despite lessons learned in Chechnya, the Russkies have underestimated the power of the little man.

Don't get the wrong idea though, this is no ordinary action shooter. In fact, the gameplay promises to be far more interesting and diverse than that, with a mixture of first-person guerrilla warfare and turn-based strategy. The strategic phases take place in New York's sewer systems, now the centre of resistance operations, where your job is to direct movements around the city, deciding where to strike and liberating the city sector by sector.

Action missions are mostly team-based, with teams growing in size as you recruit more and more irate Americans to your cause, although direct control over teammates will be kept to a minimum. The missions themselves promise to be pleasantly varied, often boasting multiple objectives and multiple levels of success. For example, you might be tasked with destroying a Soviet HQ in one mission, but unless you also blow up the nearby airfield you'll find yourself facing devastating

helicopter attacks on your next incursion. The development team wants the missions to be interlocking in this way, with rewards for exploration and taking the initiative. If you poke around enough you'll find all manner of strategically important bits and pieces – bridges, supply dumps, airfields – and as head firebrand it's up to you to decide whether to destroy them, commandeer or simply avoid them.

The usual assortment of real-world and semi-fictional weapons will also be on offer, including machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, Molotov cocktails and your sinewy working man's fists. Also included is a selection of drivable vehicles, both military and civilian. With the help of IO's Glacier Engine, *Freedom* has a simple but appealing graphical tone that favours broad urban spaces over level of detail, and already appear quite stunning. Chaos reigns amid a cacophony of voice cues, combat talk, and stuff blowing up, the AI ensuring that the action never becomes dull. Plus there are plans for eight-way multiplayer support.

The flag waving begins next spring. 

“Your job is to direct movements around the city, deciding where to strike and liberating the city sector by sector”



BULLETIN

**BAD
JUJU**



■ **NEWS EDITOR** Anthony Holden

▲ Something just wasn't right with the world this month. Aside from little things like the flare-up of hostilities in various international hotspots and the fact that I was assaulted by a drunken meathead in a West End bar, things have been a bit shaky in the games world as well.

For starters, there was the sudden closure of Cryo (see page 16). While not such a big deal for UK gamers, the untimely demise of such an established publishing presence must send a warning out to other less prominent games companies.

Elsewhere, the offices of Swedish developer Mindark, creators of the recently launched 'real cash' MMORPG *Project Entropia*, were raided by piracy cops following claims regarding the use of unlicensed software. The investigators allegedly came away empty-handed, but Mindark quickly voiced its suspicions that Microsoft had engineered the raid to damage their online project, seeing it as a threat to *Asheron's Call 2*. Needless to say, legal wranglings are now in progress.

Then of course there was the release of *America's Army*, part one. While we downloaded it just as eagerly as everyone else, it is nevertheless a disturbing move by the US government. The hijacking of games in order to disseminate a political message, no matter what the flavour of that message, is a very dangerous thing in my eyes. We'll be looking at the possible consequences of this next issue.

▼ Luckily, no matter how much company shareholders and military power brokers try to put their fingers in the gaming pie, the games themselves continue to find new ways to entertain us. Although maybe that's just their way of keeping us pacified...

Uncle Sam Ownz j00

The US Army begins its contentious assault on the gaming community



While the *RECON* pack offers only a basic boot camp, the full game could be the most comprehensive military sim ever.

AMID MUCH controversy, the first part of the *America's Army* game project has been released free on the Internet.

Announced just last May at the E3 games expo, *America's Army* is a US Government initiative to improve the image of the US military and attract young people to sign up. The morally questionable package comes in two parts: *Operations* and *Soldiers*. *Operations* is an Unreal-powered first-person shooter modelled on real-life equipment and tactics used by the US military, while *Soldiers* is a 2D role-playing game

designed to simulate other elements of life in the army.

The first part of the game, *Army Operations: RECON*, was rushed out to coincide with America's Independence Day celebrations, and consisted of a small portion of the final *Operations* game. A few training levels and multiplayer maps was all that was on offer, with further mini-packs such as *Sniper* and *Ranger* set to follow. Though it's difficult to get the feel of the entire game from this small portion, the initial impressions are of a highly competent game, at least in technical terms.

In fact, apart from the ethical issues at stake, the most startling thing about this release is the fact that it is the first game to be released with the new generation of Unreal engine technology in place (beating out even *UT 2003*). Effectively, this means that the US Army now has the most technologically advanced FPS on the market, and what's more it's completely free (unless you're a US taxpayer of course).

Clearly this fact alone has been a huge incentive for gamers to download the self-confessed recruitment tool, and in the first 36 hours of release, *Army Operations: RECON* was downloaded several hundred thousand times.

Charges that the game is insidious propaganda, deeply irresponsible, and an inappropriate use of taxpayers' dollars continue to be fired at the US Government, but at present these voices are being drowned out by the sound of a million young people downloading and playing the game.

We'll take a more in-depth look at this divisive game next issue.



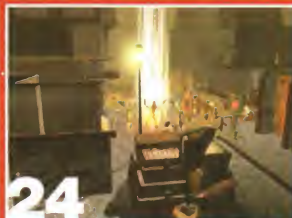
America's Army Team •
www.americasarmy.com



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HOTSHOTS
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Raw entertainment

Can you smeeeeeell what THQ is cooking?



Grown men in fetish gear engaged in homoerotic foreplay for an audience of rednecks. How can you not love it?

IT'S TIME TO get the F out. Following a humiliating legal defeat by a bunch of animal lovers (the World Wildlife Fund), mega-sports entertainment corporation the WWF (World Wrestling Federation) has been forced to rename their brand WWE. However, they can no doubt take some consolation from the news that the WWF (I mean E) brand is finally making its way into the PC games arena.

Named after the WWF (sorry, E) flagship broadcast, *WWE RAW* will finally give PC gamers the chance to engage in the kind of ridiculous make-

believe antics that have made The Rock a household name and kindled the political career of one-time US Governor Jesse 'The Body' Ventura.

In true professional wrestling tradition, you'll have to forge relationships with numerous steroid-pumped and oiled-up grapplers, as you chase a title shot at the WWF (E, E, bloody E!) heavyweight title. The game is set to feature 35 WWF (sod it, E) superstars including the likes of Triple-H, The Rock, The Undertaker as well as a number of WWF (EEEEEE!!) Divas.

Each of the 35 hulks and cat-fighting babes will have accurately recreated special moves, such as the body-slammng Rock-Bottom and the Undertaker's wear-em-like-a-feedbag Last Ride manoeuvre. The intense action, be it singles, tag, tornado tag, slobber-knocker or hardcore will not only be consigned to the ring, as battles spill out into both the crowd and the backstage area, where there'll be more than ten fully destroyable and randomly generated areas. With TV-style presentation, an option to create your



own superstar and some inane babbling from a collection of real-life commentators, this debut PC outing for the (to hell with it) WWF could well be The Next Big Thing in PC sports entertainment, "and that's the bottom line, 'cos PC ZONE said so."

THQ • ETA November 2002 •
www.thq.com

Three times the terror

Our worst fears have come true: *Aliens Vs Predator 3* is on its way

BRUSH OFF YOUR motion tracker – Fox Interactive has revealed plans for *Aliens Versus Predator 3*, the next game in its fear-infested FPS franchise.

No gameplay specifics have been revealed at this stage, but we can safely assume that the tense atmosphere, intricate plot and intersecting storylines of the

previous game will return, along with a much greater focus on the predalien, the hybrid creature showcased in forthcoming *AvP2* add-on *Primal Hunt*. Following from the brilliant job they did on *AvP2*, coding duties will again fall to US developer Monolith, currently busy with *Tron 2.0*. Meanwhile, Fox has also revealed plans

for other PC games set in both the *Aliens* and *Predator* universes.

We'll be chasing this up with all the tenacity of a facehugger without a host, and will have more concrete details soon.

Fox Interactive • ETA TBC •
www.foxinteractive.com

SHORTS

CRYO ICED



French publisher/developer Cryo, along with its subsidiary Cryonetworks, has gone bust under the weight of massive debts. Known for such recent triumphs as *The Shadow Of Zorro* and *Atlantis III*, Cryo will be missed by lovers of incomprehensible French adventure games everywhere. The future of the company's licences and forthcoming titles, which include online role-player *Dune Generations* and space sim *Haegemonia*, remains unclear. Other game companies to suffer from the current economic slump include Midway and Vivendi Universal (parent company of Blizzard, Sierra and Universal Interactive), both of which posted massive share price drops at the end of June.

ZAPPED



Infogrames has announced a new arcade action game for PC called *Zapper*. In development at Blitz Games, the brains behind *Frogger 2: Swampy's Revenge*, the game takes the basic avoid 'em up principles of *Frogger* and spreads them across six worlds of frantic platform-style gameplay. While clearly aimed at a younger audience, *Zapper* nonetheless has potential to be a decent arcade romp, and is due in November.

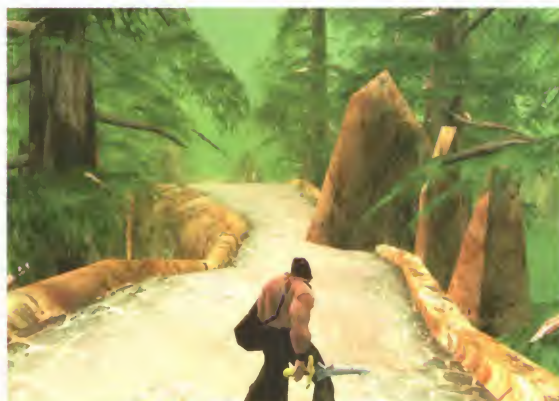
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK



Mythic Entertainment, creators of popular medieval MMORPG *Dark Age Of Camelot*, has announced its next massively multiplayer development, *Imperator*. Set in a futuristic alternate universe in which the Roman Empire never fell, *Imperator* is aiming for a distinctive sci-fi theme in a civilisation spanning many planets. In a marked shift from the complex *DAoC*, Mythic is hoping to attract a mainstream audience to its next title, openly setting out to compete for market share with *Star Wars Galaxies*. Brave move. No launch date has been set as yet.

Worlds collide

Planet RTS smashes into the land of online action in *Savage*



You can deploy AI bots to do the dirty work of resource gathering and building, but your fighting force will be entirely player-controlled.

TRUE INNOVATIONS in gaming don't come around every month, but Californian developer S2 Games might just have hit upon one with its ambitious multiplayer-only debut, *Savage*.

The concept is as simple as they come. Take your average fantasy RTS, with its battlefield manoeuvring, resource gathering, troop deploying and suchlike. But where before you had only idiotic AI troops making a feeble parody of human autonomy with their scripted behaviours, you insert the real thing. Real human players, playing the game as they would any other third-person action game, except with a human commander giving orders, co-ordinating attacks and issuing rewards. It's one of the most courageous attempts at a hybrid-genre game we've seen for some time, and one with undeniable potential. (Though to be fair, the same idea was toyed with in the *Battlezone* games, but to nowhere near the extent seen here.)

Savage is set in a unique fantasy world in which human and beast are engaged in a bloody struggle for resources. The selfish, greedy humans have descended into a primitive state, with little but swords and arrows to defend themselves. The beasts are growing smarter and stronger every day. Until, that

is, humanity rediscovers the ancient secrets of science... Thus the stage is set for an epic RTS cum third-person action battle.

Practically speaking, *Savage* is actually two games at once rather than a blend of the two. If you're playing as commander, the game is a fully-fledged online RTS, with resources to manage, tech trees to climb and defences to build and maintain. But, of course, the fact that you are controlling as well as fighting against an army of infinitely cunning human players makes the whole thing vastly more complex.

The action mode, on the other hand, promises to be a very different style of gameplay. Remember all those RTS units you've been sending to their deaths without a second thought all these years? Well now you are one. Except in third-person mode, fighting for your life in highly-skilled melee combat.

In an effort to ensure that both sides of the game work together, a clever system of incentives and balances has been introduced. If the commander gives too many bad orders, the action players can vote him out, command falling to the next in line. If a soldier disobeys orders, he can be deprived of unit upgrades and the benefits of new research.

Clearly there's going to be a lot of balancing issues to deal with before this concept comes together, but the foundation is in place for one of the most innovative titles in years.

S2 Games • ETA 2003 • www.s2games.com



It's estimated that games will last between 15 minutes and three hours, the option of persistent servers having been rejected.



Secret war

Quite literally, the biggest game you've never heard of



The game takes place in an area roughly equal to the size of North America. Including Canada. And Mexico.

IT MAY NOT look like much at this stage, but tactical shooter *Söldner – Secret Wars* is one of the most stupidly ambitious games we've ever seen. Ridiculously so, in fact.

Loosely reminiscent of *Operation Flashpoint*, but with a much greater emphasis on multiplayer action, *Söldner* is a tactical team-based battlefield simulator played from a third-person perspective. It's also preposterously big.

The game takes place in a single seamless environment, 6500km by 3500km in area. Yes, that's kilometres, not metres. Not only is this somewhat hard to believe, but it seems somewhat counter-productive to the aim of making a tight and playable game. The entire game world and everything in it is also deformable, with the terrain

engine apparently able to model the destructive effect of any explosion up to the size of a tactical nuke.

All this is clearly quite silly. But the developers say that individual games will take place in small areas determined by mission objectives. Which seems to defeat the point, but anyway...

The game also holds some promising innovations in team communication. To some extent mirroring developments in *Savage* (opposite page), *Söldner* will allow players in commanding roles to direct players on to their destinations on a tactical map, creating conspicuous waypoints visible only to the soldier in question.

Wings Simulations • ETA May 2003 • www.secretwars.net

Hungry like the wolf

Battle Realms prepares for the coming of winter



Help free the Wolf clan from the yoke of Lotus Clan slavery.



Resource management will take a back-seat.

DESPITE EMERGING IN an RTS climate that seemed to be revolving primarily around the 'bigger, badder, faster' school of strategy ("More units! More carnage!"), the focus of Liquid Entertainment's *Battle Realms* on the importance of the individual unit struck a chord with RTS fans everywhere. Good news then, with the announcement that the warriors of *Realms* will be back this autumn in expansion pack *Winter Of The Wolf*.

Where the original game followed the Serpent Clan and the emerging Dragon Clan, *Winter Of The Wolf* concentrates on the untameable Wolf Clan. A prequel to *Battle Realms* in story terms, the new lupine outing will chart the history of the hero Grayback and his clan's struggle to free itself from enslavement.

As well as containing 12 new single-player missions, the add-on will allow you to turn your town centres into training grounds, where you can create and upgrade units such as battle maidens, witches, reapers and enforcers. New hero units will be available for each of the four clans, each with their own special abilities to spring on your enemies, and all of the clans have been generally rebalanced to keep the yin in line with the yang. We're also told that resource management will be downplayed in the new episode following feedback from fans.

Expect an early September release with a review next issue.

Liquid Entertainment • ETA Autumn 2002 • battlerealm.ubi.com

SHORTS

RUFF JUSTICE



Looking a bit like a less stylish and less mature *MDK 2*, *Ruff Trigger: The Vanocore Conspiracy* is a console-style platform shooter starring bounty hunter Ruff Trigger, a genetically enhanced sled dog sent to hunt down a horde of mutant piglets. It's currently approaching completion at Italian developer Playstos Games.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT



Take 2 has announced an offbeat new isometric RTS called *Emergency 2*, to be released at the end of August. The game puts you in the role of commander of emergency services in a catastrophe-prone city. Forest fires, hostage situations, nuclear meltdowns and more must be dealt with by your team of rescue staff and vehicles. The game will retail at £19.99.

VALVE BACKS DOD



Having had a modicum of success with little known counter-terrorism mod *Counter-Strike*, *Half-Life* developer Valve has signed up another popular mod of its FPS for continued development. The leading developer has entered into an official partnership with the team behind top-notch *World War II* mod *Day Of Defeat*. Version 3.0 of the mod was launched recently, and can be downloaded at dayofdefeatmod.com.

UTTER RUBBISH



Trash is a post-apocalyptic 3D real-time strategy title now approaching completion at small US developer Inhuman Games. The game, which sees humans, mutants and machines vying for control of the world's trash, has just entered beta testing. For more info, or to sign up for the beta test, check out www.inhumangames.com.

SHORTS

FREE WHEELING



Reflections Studios recently released the first impressive footage of *Driver 3*, the latest title in its crime/driving series. It's not certain what platforms the game is destined for, though Infogrames tells us that a PC version is a "good possibility". The original *Driver*, now a classic, was well received on PC, though the over-ambitious sequel was a no-show. Despite this, it seems like a pretty safe bet that the latest instalment will eventually make its way to our monitors. The new game will continue the tradition of reckless driving and violence, across three cities based on Miami, Nice and Istanbul.

INFERNAL FANTASY



Mayhem Studios is an undistinguished Slovakian developer that's only released one title we know of (old-skool adventure *Lost Island*), but in recent months that's changed, with a bunch of new projects being revealed, taking its development load up to an ambitious five games (including stealth FPS *Sniper*). The latest is a traditional fantasy RPG called *Neverend*, which hopes to offer a role-playing experience with all the scale and detail of a *Final Fantasy* outing, but in a more familiar pseudo-medieval setting. It's due at the end of the year.

JUNGLE ROT



The makers of celebrated space RTS titles *Imperium Galactica 1* and 2 have announced a new 3D strategy title. Currently going by the snappy title *Platoon: The 1st Airborne Cavalry Division In Vietnam*, the new venture is a small-scale squad-based RTS that puts you in the shoes of a US Army recruit at the outset of conflict in Vietnam. Charting your rise through the ranks, gaining troops as you go, *Platoon* may have some appeal to hardcore war-gamers, but on current form looks unlikely to upset the likes of *C&C: Generals*.

D-Day 3D

G.I. Combat takes the battle for Normandy into another dimension



War ain't pretty. This one more than most.



The over-shoulder view puts an end to line of sight guesswork.

FOR A CERTAIN brand of strategy gamer, the *Close Combat* series is pretty much the definitive example of real-time battling in a WW2 setting. Historical accuracy, realistic combat mechanics, no annoying micromanagement – indeed its only real problem was the 2D map that made judging the lay of the land a matter of pot luck. *G.I. Combat* is the latest game from the team behind the *CC* series, albeit under the auspices of a new company, and it promises to bring all the same WW2 action into full 3D.

While the game is still a bit on the ugly side, the scope for tactical subtlety is vast. With no resource gathering and only around 20 units (tanks and infantry) to control at any given time, the emphasis is on careful marshalling of your forces, and the realistic combat engine means the gung-ho rookie is going to get punished.

Though for the most part you'll take a bird's eye view of the whole battlefield to keep tabs on enemy movements, a click of the mouse will send the fully dynamic camera

diving into a third-person view from the selected unit. This allows you to check lines of sight, as well as watching your troops taking cover, loading weapons, vaulting walls and doing a host of other stuff intended to bring the action alive.

The game should be out by now in the States, and the word is we can expect it over here in the next few months.

Freedom Games • ETA Q4 2002 •
www.gicombat.com

Sending out an SMS

Your mobile phone is another weapon of war in online RTS *Time Of Defiance*

YOU'RE SITTING IN a restaurant opposite the girl from reception you've fancied for months. A message arrives on your mobile. With a start, you shoot out of your seat: "I've got to get home, Nesperona is under assault!" you cry. "And if I don't rally my frigates, my mining facilities will be next!" She ends up shacking up with that dork from accounts and you never even get off first base. But it's a price worth paying for success in the new persistent-world online RTS *Time Of Defiance*.

Brought to you by the chaps behind the *Creatures* games, *Time Of Defiance* is an empire managing sci-fi RTS set among the many islands of North Nesperona. Games are played entirely online and last around a month. You explore and colonise new islands, mine resources and build an economic and military infrastructure in a world populated by up to 1,000 players per map.

But in a gameworld that never sleeps, what happens while you are offline can be as important as what happens on. Neighbours menacing your outlying colonies while you're away for the weekend? Get a text message or an email sent to warn you so you can rush home and deal with it.

Of course, less drastic and less socially obtrusive solutions are available, such as setting up strong automated defences. The developers claim that he who plays most doesn't win most, but we still need some convincing on that one.

The game is set up to run on a 56K modem, and will cost around a £7.50 a month, with a special introductory launch price of less than a fiver.

Nicely Crafted Entertainment • ETA August •
www.nicelycrafted.com



If only you could give orders by phone, then we'd be getting somewhere.

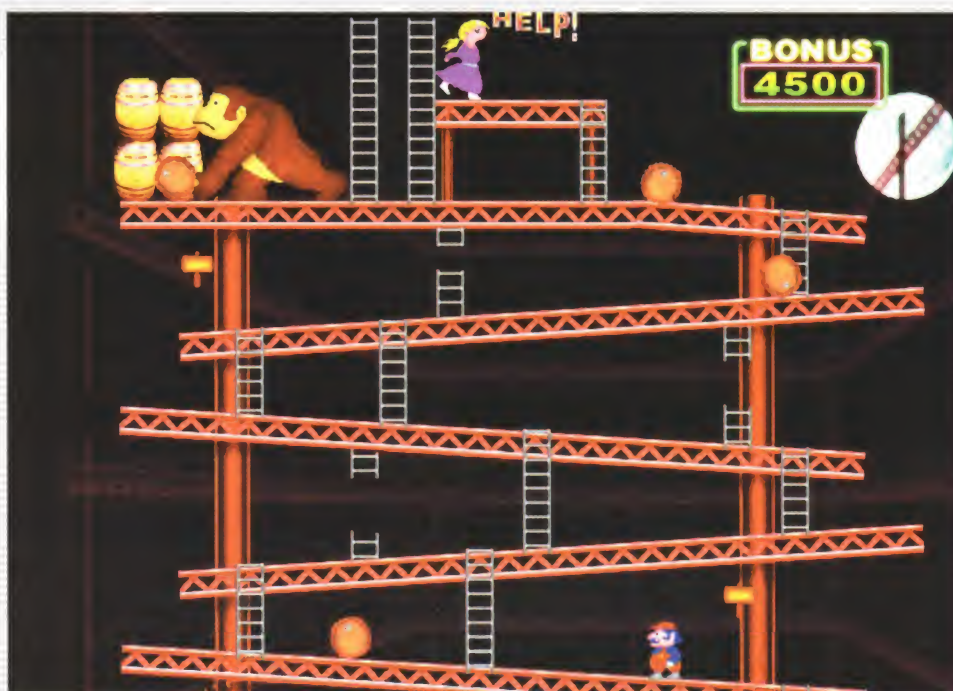
EMULATION ZONE

Stuart Campbell reports from a world where no platform is out of reach

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE RIGHT...

SOMETIMES IT'S ALL too easy to see why certain elements of the videogames industry make such a fuss about emulation. It's nothing to do with it damaging them financially and it's nothing to do with "protecting their intellectual property". The simple truth is, sometimes emulation is just plain embarrassing to the games business, because frequently the guys doing it at home in their bedroom – in their spare time and for free – do a better job than the well-paid professional developers. Examples are countless, including various official retrogaming releases that are not only poorer quality and worse value but are also less authentic than their emulated counterparts. But while straight recreation is one side of emulation, bedroom coders can also show the pros a thing or two when it comes to updating their products.

Alert *PC ZONE* readers will recall the less-than-flattering reviews given recently to some Infogrames/Atari updatings of classic arcade properties such as *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug*. And yet, an emulation project that hasn't even been updated for more than two years effortlessly eclipses what the software business demands large chunks of your hard-earned cash for. EMU DX is, at heart, a MAME-style emulator, running the ROM code of a whole bunch of old coin-ops including *Donkey Kong*, *Pac-Man*, *Ms Pac-Man*, *Frogger* and *Galaxian*. The difference, though, is that the coders have cleverly managed to replace the graphics and sound with brand-new modern visuals, effects and music, while obviously the ROM emulation retains the exact original gameplay. The effect, as you can see from these screenshots, is beautiful (in the case of *Donkey Kong* especially) – though what you can't see is the lovely shimmering translucencies on *DK*'s fireballs and *Pac-Man*'s ghosts, making them look like REAL fire and REAL ghosts – and the new sounds and music, while



XX

adhering strictly to the flavour of the originals, are executed to similarly high standards.

Tragically, EMU DX no longer appears to be in development, which is a terrible shame as many games had already been worked on to an advanced stage, including *Mr Do*, *Pengo*, *Phoenix*, *Zaxxon* and *Kung Fu*

Master. We can only hope that the games industry continues to pump out more poor-quality 'updates' of classic games until the DX team can bear it no longer.

LINKS

www.sys2064.com/emudx.htm – Download EmuDX files homepage

JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH

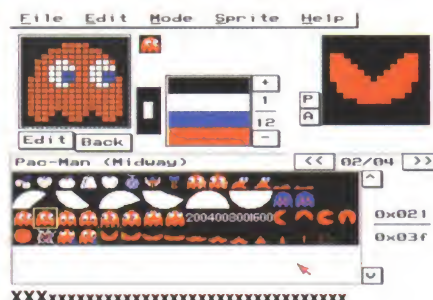


In a less impressive but thematically similar vein, people have been messing with existing emulators for years to produce 'hacked' versions of games. The most extreme example is probably *PacMame*, a derivative of MAME existing purely to run almost 300 hacked versions of *Pac-Man* and its sibling titles, including hacks like invisible mazes, graphics taken from the Atari VCS version, and characters replaced by those from other classic games.

One of the recent efforts is the 'Simpsons' hack of *Tapper*, replacing the original characters with the



familiar boozehounds of Moe's Bar. All your favourites are here – even Bart shows up in a special cameo as the Beer Bandit in the between-round bonus game. What's more, if you fancy trying your hand at something similar – maybe you'd like to superimpose your own face on one of the butch *Final Fight* guys, or put Chun-Li in some perky rubber gear – there's a program made just for you. *Turaco* – The Ultimately Radical Arcade Changing Operator – lets you rip the graphics out of ROM files and replace them with your own, with semi-limitless possibilities. Why not have a



go and let us see what you can do? Emulation Zone will personally cough up a prize for the funniest.

LINKS

www.mameworld.net/pacmame – PacMame homepage
<http://home.no.net/pacmania/pacmame/pacmame.html> – PacMame Norway
www.80svideos.com/arcadehacks/index.php3 – Simpsons Tapper hack
<http://www.csh.rit.edu/~jerry/turaco> – Turaco homepage

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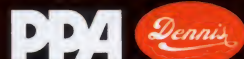
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Mobile suits

Disinclined to underestimate Korea ever again, we take a closer look at *Netsphere*

POLITE, FRIENDLY AND surprisingly good at football, the Koreans are also, as we know, obsessed with PC gaming. Having won the hearts of the Western world with their plucky performance in the World Cup, they are now getting back to their inexorable assault on our minds, with yet another online-only game for the global market.

Taking a huge lead from Japanese anime series such as *Gundam* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *Netsphere* is a mech-based FPS that blends high-speed aerial combat with strategic teamplay and arcade-style sword fighting. Think *Tribes* meets *Shogo* and you're on the right track.

Entering the game as a mercenary mech pilot, you'll be required to ally yourself to one of three warring corporations. Each group offers a unique selection of armoured suits, including models outfitted for sniping, high speed and heavy weapons. Game types are set to include standard deathmatch and CTF, as well as mech racing, fleet battles and objective-based rounds.

Although it never took off in the UK, the precursor to *Netsphere* (the largely identical *Axis Arena*) gained a cult following in the US and elsewhere thanks to online distribution system through RealNetworks. So while

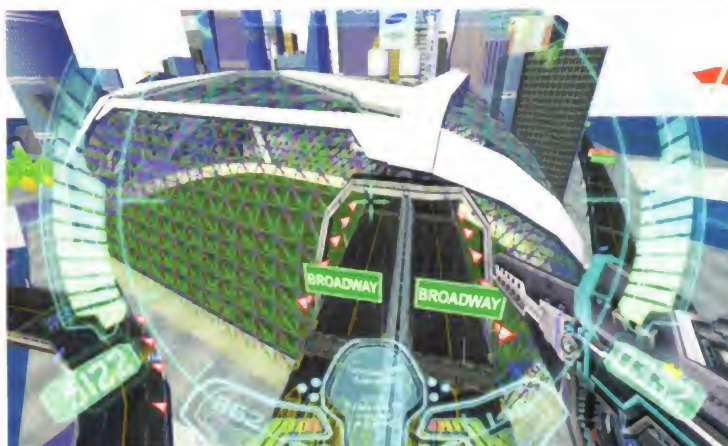
there are no plans at present to release the game in the UK, chances are the US version will be downloadable in due time.

Italy paid a price for dismissing the Koreans – don't make the same mistake.

Jamie Systems • ETA TBC •
www.netspherearena.com



Made in Korea, set in New York.



Netsphere may sound like an ISP, but it actually looks rather hot.

another **WAR**

**THE FIRST RPG TO BE
SET DURING WWII**



- another publisher
- another developer
- another war

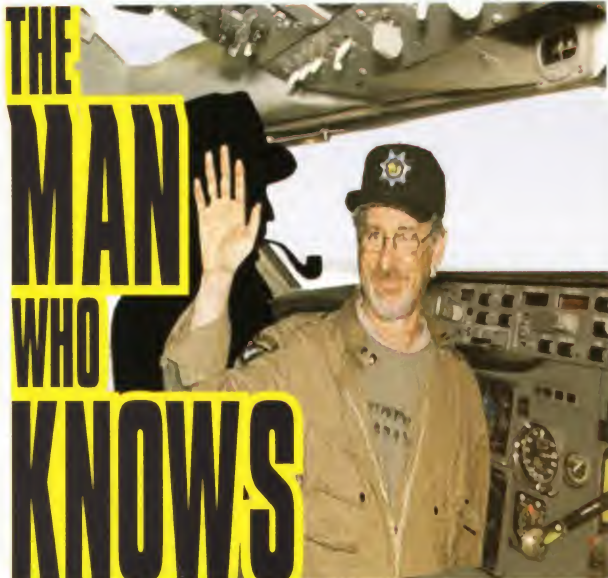
MIRAGE

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IT'S OFFICIAL: GAMES can turn you into a sociopathic criminal with little or no regard for the sanctity of human life. Either that, or they are increasingly being used as a desperate excuse for any wanton act of deviance. The latest absurd case comes from **Australia**, where a man involved in a fatal high-speed chase has claimed that he was re-enacting the 1998 game *Need For Speed III: Hot Pursuit*. Following a bag snatch south of **Sydney** in January of last year, **Trevor Edward Holton**, 26, led police on a chase at speeds of up to 180 kilometres per hour, spookily mimicking the gameplay of **Electronic Arts'** quality arcade racer. In a further sinister similarity, spikes were laid on the road in an attempt to halt the stolen **Toyota Prado** being recklessly driven by the fugitive. However, instead of being issued with a ticket, as in the game, Holton careered into **Senior Constable James Affleck**, 43, propelling his broken, lifeless body some 80 metres. The stolen vehicle then crossed the freeway, somersaulted several times and ended up on its roof. Holton fled, leaving the uninjured four-year-old daughter of a friend's common-law wife in the car. After deliberating for three days, the **Supreme Court** reached a verdict of murder. EA is yet to break its silence over the tragic case, although a sequel to *Hot Pursuit* has been announced.

Half-Life is being used to teach young men to kill. **The British Army** is using a specially developed version of the classic game in order to train its troops to use new weapons and tactics without the risk of being brutally slaughtered. **Major Bruce Pennell** of the army's **Logistics Corps**, barked: "Obviously, being killed in the virtual world isn't quite so serious. We don't have virtual officers writing letters to the dead soldiers' virtual parents, but we'd hope the games are authentic enough to reinforce good teaching."

Steven Spielberg has admitted that he is chronically addicted to **Microsoft Flight Simulator**, and has lost months of his life to the game, despite being terrified of flying. The hairy-chinned director confessed: "I have 2000 hours on the Microsoft PC simulator. But I haven't ever practically piloted an aircraft through the air. Because I'm afraid to fly."

Maverick musician **Mike Oldfield** has ploughed more than half a million pounds of his own money into a PC game that will never appear on the shelves of your local games store. The self-confessed **acid casualty**, best known for his 1972 opus *Tubular Bells*, has been closely involved in the development of *Tres Lunas*, a non-violent affair, which can best be described as indulgent New Age bollocks. The game is downloadable from the official Mike Oldfield fan-site and will also be bundled with his new album, which, coincidentally, has been described as indulgent New Age bollocks. Oldfield, 49, admits having difficulty attracting publishers, blubbing: "When I showed Activision this thing, they saw the dolphins and said 'How do you kill them?'" Quite.

"An Australian man involved in a fatal high-speed chase has claimed that he was re-enacting the 1998 game *Need For Speed III: Hot Pursuit*"



The fast-paced turnless mode will be a far cry from *Civ's* traditional gameplay.

Slay the world

The world's favourite strategy game finally goes online

IMMENSELY POPULAR STRATEGY series *Civilization* is set to finally become a true online phenomenon with the release of *Civilization 3: Play The World* later this year. Instead of *Civ 2's* laborious PBeM (Play By eMail) multiplayer system, Sid Meier and the Firaxis team have created a real-time hybrid of the game. The expansion pack will also include extensive tweaks of the single-player game including extra races, leaders and units, as well as some interface and rule changes.

While the real-time system is the most intriguing new multiplayer feature, there will also be a straight turn-based mode and a 'simultaneous turn-based' mode with players working against the clock.

Given that an average game of *Civ* can last hours or days, Sid and co have built in some interesting game modes to speed things up, such as elimination mode, where losing even a

single city knocks you out, and 'regicide', in which you have to destroy your enemy's leader units.

The eight new races include the Spanish, the Mongols, the Ottomans and the Gauls, each of which will also have a new specialist unit. The Spanish, for example, will have the Conquistador, who will most likely be blessed with the power of genocide and be able to destroy entire civilisations with the help of a few hundred men and some trinkets bought from a Barcelona corner shop.

Other additions include radars to detect air raids, outposts to quash barbarians, novelty tile sets and the ability to construct airfields anywhere in your territory. Not to mention a comprehensive game editor allowing you to create endless scenarios from any time period.

Firaxis • ETA Q4 2002 • www.civ3.com



Whether *Civ* can retain all its addictive qualities in online clashes is another question...

King of the ring

Two gaming heavyweights face off in the battle to be Lord of the Rings



VU's effort has a simple yet charming look.

AS LORD OF THE RINGS fans will no doubt be well aware, two powerful legions are currently preparing themselves for a vicious and bloody clash to decide the future of Middle Earth. Not the forces of orc and humankind, but the publishers of the two major *Rings* titles now in development – EA, with their film-licensed *The Two Towers*, and VU Games, with their book-licensed *The Fellowship Of The Ring*.

After some indecision from said parties, we're now able to confirm that both of these titles are indeed destined for the PC. What's more, they both look different enough to warrant interest.

Firstly VU's title, which we introduced back in issue 113. A third-person action-adventure game, *The Fellowship Of The Ring* allows you to play as Frodo, Aragorn or Gandalf, and closely follows the events of the first book. Displaying a strong influence from console titles such as *Legend Of Zelda* on the

N64, the game is in development at Seattle-based Surreal Software, creators of likewise third-person action-adventure *Drakan*.

EA's title on the other hand, *The Two Towers*, has been forced to cram the action of the first and second films into one game in order to catch up with the film cycle. Visually the more impressive of the two, *The Two Towers* promises to be a fairly simple, console-driven affair, with an emphasis on hack 'n' slash action. Which may be no bad thing.

Both of these games have plenty of promise, though at the same time neither is putting forward a strong impression of being the definitive *LOTR* game.

We'll be delving deeper into both of these titles in the near future.

FELLOWSHIP: Surreal Software • ETA Q4 2002 • www.lotr.com

TWO TOWERS: Stormfront • ETA TBC • www.lordoftherings.ea.com



Big-screen action all the way in *Two Towers*.

Counter-attack

Gritty urban fraggging takes shape in *New World Order*



A familiar scenario emerges in a market square...



A quick game of Gauntlet between frags?

THE DOMINANCE OF *Counter-Strike* in team-based online gaming is now assumed, its following far too large for just any imitator to worry it. However, contenders for second place are still coming thick and fast, despite recent failures such as *Global Ops* and *Team Factor*.

The latest hopeful is *New World Order*, a technically impressive urban shooter from Sweden. By and large, it doesn't pretend to be anything other than a distillation of and improvement upon all the things that have made *Counter-Strike* the phenomenon it is. Great weapon balance, team-based multiplayer scenarios and just for good measure, an extensive single-player campaign.

Set in the near future, *NWO* pits the all round terrorist-bashing forces of the Global Assault

Team against the forces of terrorism, headed up by the mysterious Syndicate.

Technically, the game looks great, with superb textures and lighting, all powered by Termite's in-house DVA engine. It's designed to run with up to 64 players and will ship with the comprehensive G-Max level creator tools, opening it up for high-level modding from the outset. Apparently, it's also resistant to cheats, hacks and other nefarious fiddling of the sort that has plagued *Counter-Strike*.

Just what *NWO* has to offer to *CS* veterans is clearly the big question here, and we'll shed more light on this in a preview next issue.

Termite Games • ETA October • www.termite-games.com/new_world_order



CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it



ChartTrack

TOP 10



		TITLE	WEEKS IN CHART	SCORE
1	NEW	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS	1	91%
2	▼	GRAND THEFT AUTO III	6	95%
3	NEW	GRAND PRIX 4	2	86%
4	▼	SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX	5	92%
5	▼	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	13	66%
6	–	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT	20	94%
7	NEW	OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RESISTANCE	1	83%
8	▲	THE SIMS	125	86%
9	▲	THE SIMS: HOT DATE	32	71%
10	▼	THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND	5	94%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Neverwinter Nights is good, but no *Baldur's Gate*. Case closed.
jeff_77

I'm addicted to *Morrowind*. I haven't been this hooked on a game for years. Well, months anyway. I'm actually a bit worried about where it's all leading. Help?
himajin

Bloody hell! Bloody, gory and bloody good with blood in it. *Double Helix* roxors. I love this game!
SWAT

I'm so relieved. You guys liked *Grand Prix 4*, and it's in the charts, so I'm thinking it must be decent. Geoff Crammond is back. Praise be.
albert_



megastores

TOP 10

- 1 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
- 2 WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
- 3 GRAND THEFT AUTO III
- 4 MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
- 5 OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RESISTANCE
- 6 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX
- 7 GRAND PRIX 4
- 8 THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
- 9 THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY
- 10 CRICKET 2002

COMPETITION



megastores

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, **PC ZONE** and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: Which edition of the AD&D rule system lies beneath BioWare's stunning new RPG *Neverwinter Nights*?

Answers on a postcard to: **PC ZONE** Chart Compo (CPCZ9A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: August 21, 2002

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to **PC ZONE**.

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

CHART COMMENT

BASED ON CHART-TRACK TOP 10

WHAT SORT OF topsy-turvy world are we living in? Not only is summer stubbornly refusing to materialise, but the traditional summer lull, when no good games are released because we're all too busy having fun outdoors, has likewise been abandoned. Last month's top ten was impressive, but this month's is truly out of season. Witness the eight award-winning games including five *PC ZONE* classics and three new entries.

Most notable, of course, is *Neverwinter Nights*, officially the top selling PC game at time of press. *Morrowind* too is hanging on, if only just, making for an impressive role-playing presence in the top ten. Shooters prove their perennial popularity once again with the entry of the new *Flashpoint* add-on at seven, though the abundance of new titles has also pushed *Jedi Knight II* down to 12th after a respectable three month innings.

But perhaps the most notable trend in the charts lately is the complete absence of RTS titles, generally one of the most popular genres with UK gamers. *Warcraft III* will of course rectify this, but its release came too late to register in this month's charts. It'll be interesting to see how long it lasts.

Anthony Holden

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...



Divine Divinity

THE RPG WITH the silliest name in gaming just keeps on slipping through our fingers. We expected to have a review of Larian Studios' isometric epic for you this issue, but yet another delay has put the game back to a September release. The developers recently told us that the game contains at least 200 hours of solid role-playing, so perhaps they have a bit of a problem knowing when to stop. No reason has been given for the latest delay, but with a game of this scale, thorough play-testing must be an absolute nightmare. Once again, you can (tentatively) expect a review next issue.

Larian Studios • ETA September 13 •
www.divinedivinity.com



Heart Of Stone

FIRST ANNOUNCED over two years ago, this strategic adventure from *Commandos* creator Pyro Studios has been missing, presumed dead for some time. Until, that is, it popped up again at a recent meeting with the Pyro lads. Not only is *Heart Of Stone* very much alive, it's looking mighty playable to boot. While visually not as impressive as it was two years ago, the bright and cartoonish gameworld still has its fair share of appeal. Offering a mixture of strategy, action-adventure and role-playing elements, along with a hugely interactive environment, *Heart Of Stone* is looking in rude health.

Pyro Studios • ETA TBC •
www.pyrostudios.com



Dune Generations

WITH THE RECENT closure of French publisher/developer Cryo (see page 16), a great many games have been left without a publisher, and the future of all internal projects must be considered grim at best. Considering the, er, 'unpredictable' nature of Cryo's output, not too many of the games are likely to be mourned, but one project that did hold promise was massively multiplayer title *Dune Generations*. Scheduled for release this very Autumn, *Dune Generations* was to blend elements of real-time strategy, trading and role-playing against the rich background of the *Dune* universe. Frank Herbert fans, don't hold your breath.

Cryonetworks • ETA MIA •
www.dunegenerations.com

US TOP 10

- 1 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
- 2 THE SIMS: VACATION
- 3 THE SIMS
- 4 MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
- 5 BACKYARD BASEBALL 2003
- 6 GRAND THEFT AUTO III
- 7 ZOO TYCOON
- 8 STAR WARS: JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST
- 9 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX
- 10 THE SIMS: HOT DATE

INCOMING!

These are the big games that are going on sale in the next month or so. All dates are correct at the time of going to press, but we'd check ahead before running down to the shops in the driving rain.

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE DATE
The Sum Of All Fears	Ubi Soft	July 25
Mafia	Take2	July 26
Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	August 16
AvP2: Primal Hunt	VU Games	August 16
Tactical Ops	Infogrames	August 30
Sudden Strike 2	CDV	August 30
Medieval: Total War	Activision	August 30
Divine Divinity	CDV	September 13
Battlefield 1942	EA	September 13
Conflict Desert Storm	SCI	September 20

THE GOLDEN JOYSTICK AWARDS 2002



Vote for your favourite games of the past 12 months...

WE might be the experts who get paid to review games but you're the buying public. Ultimately you know whether the shiny disc you've inserted into your PC is worthy of the £30 that you've spent on it, or whether it's fit only for inserting somewhere unsavoury. That's why we want to give you the chance to vote for your favourite games of the last 12 months.

This year, instead of running our own awards in isolation we've teamed up with our sister magazines, *Computer And Video Games* and *PlayNation*, to bring you the biggest industry awards bash of the year. This means that as well as voting for your favourite PC games you'll be able to register your vote for games irrespective of platform. It's a living breathing democracy that even *The Daily Mail* would be proud of.

Here are the categories and some suggestions, but remember you can vote for whatever game you like as long as it was released between 15/09/01 and 15/09/02.



SPONSORED by



1 GAME OF THE YEAR (ALL PLATFORMS)

2 PC GAME OF THE YEAR

Medal Of Honor
Morrowind
Grand Theft Auto III
Max Payne
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast

3 ONLINE GAME OF THE YEAR

EverQuest: Shadows Of Luclin
Return To Castle Wolfenstein
Dark Age Of Camelot
Counter-Strike 1.5
Laser Squad Nemesis

4 BRITISH DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR

Lionhead (Black & White: Creature Isles)
Creative Assembly (Medieval: Total War)
Geoff Crammond (Grand Prix 4)
Black Cactus (Warrior Kings)

6 HARDWARE OF THE YEAR

GeForce 4
Sound Blaster Audigy
AMD Athlon
Intel Pentium 4

7 MOST WANTED GAME OF CHRISTMAS 2002

Championship Manager 4
Splinter Cell
Freelancer
Unreal 2
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero
Command & Conquer: Generals
James Bond 007: Nightfire

8 GAME INNOVATION OF THE YEAR

9 PUBLISHER OF THE YEAR

10 RETAILER OF THE YEAR



VOTE NOW!

Voting couldn't be easier. All you need to do is log onto the Internet, visit www.goldenjoystick.co.uk and submit your vote. If you register your vote you could be in line to win a prize or you could be one of the lucky five picked to join us for the evening at the swanky Dorchester Hotel in London on October 28th 2002, where you'll get to meet all your gaming heroes and eat and drink your fill for free.

You can enter all or some of the categories above and, if you log onto the website, you'll find more categories for consoles. So what are you waiting for?

www.goldenjoystick.co.uk

SEND US A BEARD!

AND WIN SOME WARCRAFT III STUFF

That's right. Send us a pic of your facial hair and we'll shower you with more *Warcraft III* gubbins than you can imagine

BLIZZARD has finally delivered on its promise and unleashed the latest game in the orc-ridden *Warcraft* series. We've reviewed the game on page 76 and were smitten by the seamless integration of an epic storyline and soundtrack into the traditional strategy environment. Of course, if you haven't got a decent soundtrack and set of speakers the experience is going to be diminished somewhat. And if you can't afford a copy of the game then you're not going to get much of an experience of anything whatsoever. Luckily, we've managed to get our hands on some Special Edition boxed copies of the game, worth £70 each, and some whiz-bang hardware to give to the lucky winner.

In keeping with the *Warcraft III* theme, all you've got to do to win is dig around, find the most amusing example of facial hair you've seen and send us a picture. The facial hair can be your own (early growth especially cultivated for the competition will be smiled upon), your relatives or it could belong to some hapless stranger you've happened across on the Internet. Anal beards are a no-go. We'll accept small JPEG files by email (letters@pczone.co.uk) or standard photographs sent to our usual address. Concept art and hand-drawn pictures will be disqualified.

The winner of our mighty competition will get a copy of the

Warcraft III boxed set, along with an action figure, a CD of the soundtrack, a DVD packed with cinematics, a mouse mat and a T-shirt, as well as a Philips 5.1 soundcard and a set of speakers. We'll also throw in a Philips razor so that you can get rid of the offending chin glove. Five runners-up will get everything bar the hardware. What are you waiting for?

NB. Do not send real beard hair.

Just send your entry in an envelope to the address below, along with with all the following information:

- Title, Forename, Surname, Address, Postcode, Daytime Phone Number and your Email Address
- Please indicate on the postcard if you are you a current subscriber

Send your entry to:

Warcraft III Competition, PC ZONE,
Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland
Street, London W1T 4JD.

Closing date: August 21 2002

■ Terms and conditions: Only entries received before the closing date will be entered into the prize draw. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. And all that. Phew!





MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Gird your loins for much smiting of thine enemies

THE DARK AGES are nearly upon us. Within weeks of reading this, half of the game playing world will be locked in rooms, lights dimmed, immersed in the wanton slaughter of *Medieval: Total War*.

But until that auspicious day arrives, you're going to have to satiate your bloodlust with these rich tapestries of limb-hacking and eye-gouging. OK, so you don't quite get to see that of detail in the epic clashes of *Medieval*, but it's hardly surprising considering the vast numbers of soldiers milling about the battlefields.

What you do get, though, is four times the level of detail of its glorious predecessor, *Shogun: Total War*. While this doesn't allow for individual eyes to be shot out à la King Harold (Hastings is one of many battles simulated here), it certainly makes troop identification a hell of a lot

easier. Remember squinting as you tried to distinguish between all those little flag-carrying guys in *Shogun*? A thing of the past dear friends, because each class of soldier now wears his own distinctive get-up. Bedouin camel riders in their white robes, Turkish Janissaries with their distinctive plumage, English Royal Knights with their plate armour, lances and flowing banners – these feudal chaps knew how to accessorise.

Best of all are the siege engines and other fiendish contraptions, including cannons, mortars and trebuchets. These bad boys smash holes in fortress walls, carve swathes through enemy ranks and generally cause enemy headaches.

We haven't had so much fun since Martin Korda got his left nut caught in the mangonel. [A+]



Creative Assembly • ETA August • www.totalwar.com



MEDIEVAL TOTAL WAR™

SOME PEOPLE SAY WAR
DOESN'T SOLVE ANYTHING.



PC
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ACTIVISION

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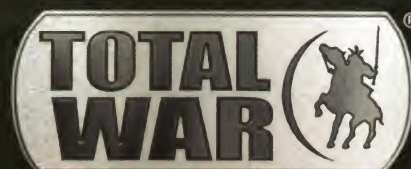
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THE WRONG STRATEGY.

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totalwar.com



SEX, LIES AND VIDEOGAMES

We think about it. Talk about it. The lucky ones do it. So why won't the games industry touch it? *Adam Phillips* goes under the covers to find out

SEX IN videogames. Remember any examples? Go on, have a long, hard think. Anything coming to you? Anything filling out? Nope, thought not, because sex in videogames is practically non-existent. Sure, we have veiled references to the subject with the likes of *Grand Theft Auto III*'s hookers (see *A Brief History Of Sex* boxout), but when compared to the likes of film, music and books, videogames are quite literally virgin territory.

Hell, just talking about it could get you fired from your industry job according to some. In the course of putting together this feature, we asked someone high up the gaming industry's food chain to offer us a few choice words on the subject. The answer was: "No, if you print what I think, I would get the sack." And in a subsequent off the record interview, their thoughts were... well... rather uncontroversial. Which makes it all the







"I think there are loads of opportunities for bringing sex into games. I would love to do it and I think it would be good to do it"

JON HARE FREELANCE GAME DESIGNER.

more surprising. To top all this off, our very own Deep Throat offered these parting words: "And I think you'll find that people just don't want to talk about the issue of sex in videogames."

And sure enough, pundit after pundit declined to be interviewed on the subject. Their reasons? "They're too busy working

to take part." A response that would seem utterly valid, except for the fact that the very same people are always willing to talk about almost anything we ever ask them about. Except for this. So forgive us for feeling a tad paranoid.

So we went back through gaming history looking for a person responsible

for a single mainstream game that has featured sex or sexual themes. And what do you know? We came across Al Lowe, who's created seven such titles – the *Leisure Suit Larry* series. For those without greying hair or bald spots, these titles, released by Sierra Online, were adventure games where the player took

on the role of the titular character whose one obsession was to get laid. The style was more Benny Hill than Ben Dover and the puzzles and gags were entertaining enough. So what does Al think about the issue of sex in games? Or the lack of it.

"If you look at TV, movies and books, sex is a big part of the storytelling."

BIG BROTHER

ADULT THEMES, SEX SCENES. THEY DECIDE WHAT WE CAN AND CAN'T SEE. MEET THE BBFC...

18

The British Board Of Film Classification. Respected and loathed in equal measure, the BBFC has been snipping its censoring scissors through controversial celluloid for years now. The arrival of videogames ('digital works' in BBFC-speak) has laden them with another entertainment form to get stuck into.

While videogames are exempt from the Video Recording Act, there are grounds for the BBFC stepping in and taking a large stick to any creative/exploitative videogame endeavours. There must be no torture, no acts of sexual force, and no depictions of "techniques likely to be useful in the commission of offences," says the BBFC (among other criteria).

Most hardcore titles following the BBFC guidelines will pass through: "All forms of legal and consenting sexual activity may be shown," explains a spokesperson for the body. "Very explicit sexual activity such as the actual sight of penetration would lead to a game being passed 'R18', making it only available in licensed sex shops – an unlikely scenario unless the 'game' is specifically created for the 'hardcore' sex market."

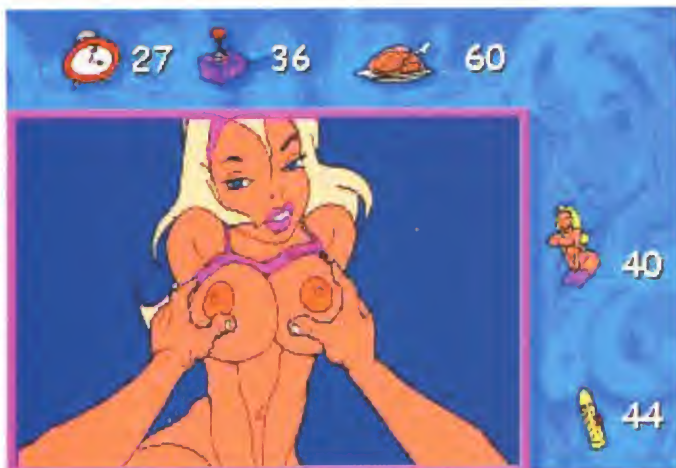
Fair enough, but what about games that use sexual content aimed at the more mainstream market? Well, the makers could find themselves on the receiving end of an 18 certificate, and if they are dead set against such a rating, they'll need to make cuts to the game's content.

As for titles that have gone too far, these have been few and far between: "There have been one or two dedicated soft porn CD-ROMs where cuts have had to be made for sexual detail which is too explicit for an '18'," offers the BBFC. "But if the title is strictly a game rather than softcore porn, that situation is extremely uncommon. The only one we can think of is *Lula VB*, which was passed '18' three or four years ago."

Whatever the ins and outs are, the BBFC's apparent lack of game submissions with sexual content illustrates that publishers both big and small simply aren't that enthused about the issue of sex...



They're here to protect us, don't you know?



Lula VB – the only game the BBFC can remember pulling up over content.



GTA III includes adult content and sophisticated humour. More please.

INTERCOURSE INTERFACE

IS TELEDILDONICS THE FUTURE OF SEX GAMING?

It's a concept that's had self-styled cyberpunks poking excitedly at their private parts like baboons for a decade or more. Imagine being able to slip into a body suit and then taking part in virtual sex while your PC massages your erogenous zones.

Teledildonics was an idea that was first touted about by the inventor of hypertext and hypermedia, Ted Nelson. In other words, the idea got taken seriously. Very seriously, with bearded types writing all manner of hypothetical nonsense about the end of real sex in this world of HIV and technology-gone-mad. Films such as *Lawnmower Man* merely added fuel to the fantasy flames with its computer-generated rendition of what it might be like to have a virtual shag.

But, for now, reality has come bounding up to wannabe virtual sex tourists and slapped them round the face. To find out where we're really up to, check out the Virtual Sex Machine. Apparently you simply load up the video, 'fit' the machine and then select the lady you want. According to the blurb, the machine 'strokes your penis with a variable intensity, changes speeds, and grips your penis harder or softer, based entirely on the action shown. It can suck hard or soft, depending on the video that is playing.'

The demo video is a hoot. But is this really what Ted Nelson meant?



The Virtual Sex Machine – time to take a reality check.



The Lawnmower Man: looking dated.

explains Al. "I think the reason we don't see sexual themes tackled in games is because of the lack of real storytelling and characters – vital elements when dealing with sex and sexual issues – otherwise you just end up with porn. We had storytelling for a while when it was just text adventures with Infocom games – in



"The reason we don't see

sexual themes in games is because of the lack of real storytelling – you would just end up with porn"

AL LOWE DESIGNER OF THE *LEISURE SUIT LARRY* SERIES

fact, adventures got to the stage where they were pretty good at telling stories. Then the 3D thing came round and suddenly, stories and characters kinda disappeared. *Half-Life* did make an attempt at storytelling – but it was still so far underneath the action."

But there are other elements at play here. Jon Hare is a freelance game designer, who has such titles as *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder* on his CV. He's particularly relevant because his game *Sex & Drugs & Rock 'N' Roll* was the only other mainstream title we could find that attempted to include sexual themes as a part of its gameplay. And it never found a publisher.

So what does he feel explains the lack of sex in games? "The concept of the market from a retail basis hasn't matured," says Hare. "In other words, games are

still seen as an extension of toys, which are traditionally aimed at children. Remember a high percentage of our market is still in supermarkets and other non-specialised outlets. They are still going to put any title in the section usually marked 'toys'."

He believes that while some games do carry 18 certificates (see *Big Brother* boxout), it's something that publishers generally want to avoid. "And putting any sex in a game means it automatically becomes an 18 – which means that most retailers feel uncomfortable about being associated with the game by stocking it."

And this, he reckons, is why the head honchos – the publishers – aren't happy about the subject of sex. They've already taken a beating in the press about violence in games. And the last thing they want is to tempt fate with yet more bad publicity by introducing serious sexual themes into their titles.

Hare goes on: "I think there are loads of opportunities for bringing sex into games. I would love to do it and I think it would be good to do it. But I don't think that there is any publisher out there who is brave enough or – in this current climate of political correctness and massive development costs – stupid enough to actually do it."

These issues of retail problems and media backlashes are backed up and expanded upon by Dr Jo Bryce, a psychologist who specialises in the study of videogames and their effects on users.

"Sex in games is a sensitive issue,"

she explains, "because of the media panics over violence in games and the debates about pornography and its relation to sexual violence."

"Given the proposed high levels of violence in some games, including sexual behaviour in such a context would be politically dangerous. It would be claimed by many experts to have the potential to create a link between sex and violence in

MY FAIR LADY



Bishoujo, or 'fair lady', games are big in Japan. But is this fair? Poor lass.

AS USUAL, THE JAPANESE ARE WELL AHEAD OF THE GAME

While the bulk of the Western world is still tiptoeing around the idea of interactive adult content like a bunch of starchy Victorian era school ma'ams, one nation is, as ever, way ahead of us: Japan. While the world's most conspicuously perverted nation is generally more interested in console games than PC (because, of course, most Japanese apartments are in fact smaller than your average PC), it does have a large and thriving PC games industry built around adult-themed games. Wander into any games store in one of Japan's famous electronics districts and you'll find an entire floor devoted to so-called 'bishoujo' ('pretty girl' or 'fair lady') games. While these are not all pornographic in nature, consisting merely of cute animé girls flashing their white cotton panties, some of them are pure filth. Full nudity, penetration, close-ups, pissing, you name it – the big-eyed animé girls in these games aren't the shy type.

Bishoujo games also cross many genres, with everything from puzzle and fighting games to romantic RPGs, sci-fi action and hardcore fetish adventures. According to Japanese law, any genitals depicted must be obscured, usually using a mosaic-like technique, though some (apparently) slip through the system. There are also one or two companies such as Peach Princess dedicated to translating and un-censoring bishoujo games for the English-speaking market.

HARD-PHWOAR!

WHILE THE MAINSTREAM SHUNS SEX IN GAMES, US-BASED SPECIALISTS HAVE BEEN KNOCKING OFF TITLES FOR YEARS...

Let's get one thing clear – *Sextris*, *Erotica Island* and *Panty Raider* are hardly what *PC ZONE* would call 'brave games pushing the sexual envelope.' At best, they are merely substandard entertainment which have taken a genre and put some tits and nobs on it. On the other side of the Atlantic though, there are companies that have been making a mint out of porn-inspired software. And claiming that they're revolutionary in the process.

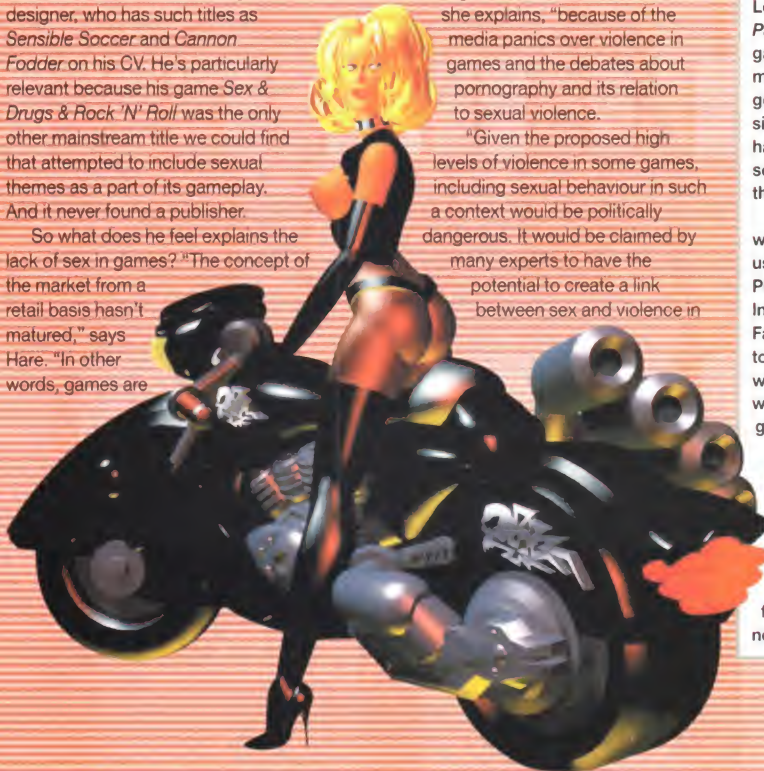
The likes of Planet Pixis and VCA Interactive are well-established 'erotic providers' who offer the user some truly unique 'sex simulators'. Planet Pixis boasts about its TFUI technology (Touch Feel User Interface), while VCA gets all hot and bothered about its Fantasex system. Both involve manipulating the mouse to match your actions on screen – move your mouse with TFUI and your virtual hands will move across a woman's breasts on screen, all accompanied by a groan of pleasure from said model.

Softcore through to hardcore are offered up and, in Pixis' case, some über-dodgy, bizarre and brutal Manga animé titles involving a nubile space traveller and demon tentacles – indeed, games that truly believe in the philosophy that 'every hole's a goal'.

But can the games industry learn anything from these titles? A unique twist on gameplay? A new dawn in user interfaces? Demos are available...



The aim of the game is to get her to drop her drawers – it doesn't look hard.





"It's only recently that mature content, especially on consoles, has started to appear in games simply because the age demographic has risen"

IAN LIVINGSTONE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, EIDOS

gamers' minds - which might translate into beliefs and behaviour in real life."

While Bryce doesn't believe that such a link would occur, she reckons the bottom line outcome of such fears for the industry is fairly simple: "I can see developers wanting to stay out of any more potential moral panics," she offers.

This obviously makes a lot of sense when you put it into the context of the recent moral hysteria that spewed forth from tabloids such as the *News Of The World* over the issue of paedophilia, and the backlash that the satirical TV show *Brass Eye* had to contend with over its treatment of the same subject.

Furthermore, the lack of adult content in the games market only reflects the adult entertainment industry in the UK generally. Unlike the US, where adult entertainment is making everybody a millionaire (see the *Hard-Phwoar* boxout), we've always been a nation of prudes, cutting pornography content almost to the level of post-watershed TV content. The BBFC is relaxing the laws to the relief of men everywhere, but it's going to take the interactive side of the market time to catch up.

By contrast US companies are actively seeking ways of exploiting the games market. Just a few weeks back the US company Private put a statement out that they were looking for a new CEO for its US division, and specifically wanted someone from the games industry to take the job. The DVD market has opened up recently with both the PS2 and Xbox complementing the massive PC market, creating a user base that Private obviously think is crying out for adult interactive entertainment. Charles Prast, president and CEO of the Private Media Group is under no illusion that the games market offers a huge potential for companies like his. Talking recently to *MCV*, the UK's largest trade magazine for games, he was quoted as saying: "We see key similarities between the development of the adult entertainment industry and

the games industry." And with an adult video and DVD market that's reaching saturation point, an avenue of expansion like this is a potential goldmine.

So are we going to trail behind the US again, waiting for adult games to become acceptable before we take the plunge? Luckily, there are some people in the



Adult Tetris: don't try this at home.

industry in the UK who think that sex in games really isn't such a hot issue; that we'll get round to it all in good time: "Sex certainly isn't a taboo subject," reckons Ian Livingstone, creative director at Eidos and a linchpin of the company's success. Like Jon Hare, he does believe that historically, gaming has been regarded as a kid's pastime but he's far more upbeat about its future.

"It's only recently that mature content, especially on consoles, has started to appear in games simply because the age demographic has risen," Livingstone offers. So what does he make of the games he's seen so far?

"In PC games, sex has been treated in a humorous way so as not to offend. It's all very 'nudge-nudge, wink-wink' - quintessentially British in that way. It reminds me of when sex first started to feature in naff films like *Confessions Of A Window Cleaner*. So it needs to be done right if it is going to increase a game's sales potential."

Giants' topless Sea Reaper. Cut for general release, 're-installed' by the Net community.

"BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME"

NEVER MIND THE PUBLISHERS AND THEIR COLD FEET. THE PUNTERS HAVE BEEN DOING IT THEMSELVES FOR YEARS...

While the industry contemplates the issue of sex in games, there are, of course, punters out there in the big bad wired world more than happy to offer up alternatives. Unfortunately because of their lack of programming sophistication, this usually involves nothing more than stripping characters of their clothing.

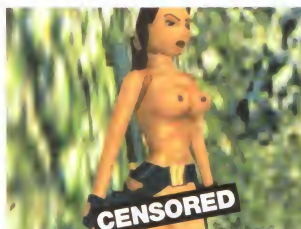
The most infamous is *Nude Raider* where Lara Croft is presented sans tight vest and hotpants, wielding her guns in the buff. This had her creators up in arms, but for a developer who has seemingly increased her breast size in every game, their po-faced protests sounded somewhat hollow at the time.

For those who would prefer something a little more off the well-beaten track though, why not download nude patches for the likes of *Severance* (Zoe, the female character only of course). Get your hands on the porn star Asia Carrera as a character for the *Unreal* series who, ironically enough, is a big fan of the *Unreal* series. She even has her own server. But perhaps what you've been waiting for all your life is the topless depiction of the Sea Reaper from *Giants*. It's a gem. As is the recent patch that makes the prostitutes in *Grand Theft Auto III* walk round with their goods on full display for any passing car jacker to sample.

The Playboy mansion of game nude patches though is *The Sims*. Well it had to be really, didn't it? Unsurprisingly for a title that has proved so popular, there are a mass of skins and objects that can be downloaded to spice up the increasingly dull series. Topless 44HH maids (with optional green pubic hair); naked S&M lesbians; nude men standing to attention - the list is endless. And all complemented with those ideal home accessories - namely furry wrist restraints, ball gags and nipple clamps. Some add-ons you probably just shouldn't put on your list for Father Christmas.



Frag US porn star Asia Carrera in Unreal...



A cultural icon stripped naked? How dare they!



This is the least explicit shot we could find of Zoe in Severance. Honest.



The Royal Mail report that they will now be delivering mail five times a day, instead of one...



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEX

▲ WE GIVE YOU OUR (VERY) POTTED GUIDE TO SAUCINESS AND NOOKIE IN MAINSTREAM GAMING OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES.

1 LEISURE SUIT LARRY

This series stretched across seven games and was inspired by the innuendo-laden antics of Benny Hill according to Al Lowe, its creator. With this emphasis on 'humour' then, players could manipulate Larry in all sorts of naughty scenarios with the ladies. Needless to say, anyone attaining an erection while playing this game should seek therapy.

2 VIRTUAL VALERIE

The title that many would say was the first bona fide mainstream sex game (in America at least). Created by Mike Saenz, the simple and explicit premise was to bring our Valerie to orgasm with a variety of different 'stimuli'. There was a sequel and another game called *Donna Matrix* but it all shrivelled up eventually...

3 DUKE NUKEM 3D

As we moved further into the '90s, it would seem any attempt to hint at the issue of nookie could only involve strippers and prossies. Witness the peep shows and pole dancers in *Duke Nukem* – hand them some cash too for an extra wiggle...

4 PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

Hookers featured, but only off-screen and accompanied by sarcastic comments whenever you did 'the business'.

5 HITMAN

This featured a buxom prossie that needed rescuing from an evil Chinese gang. Instead of a shag, she gave you information and a quick kiss. In another scene, you can hire a stripper to distract a guard outside while you place a tracker on his car. Titillating stuff... umm...

6 MAX PAYNE

A seedy bar. An evil crimelord. His 'hoe'. A smattering of references to blowjobs. Class.

7 GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Hey, look, more hookers! This time, kerb-crawl, wait for a prostitute to slip into the passenger seat and then drive to a secluded area. And hey presto, one shag later, your health has climbed, and your wedge has shrunk. HIV not included.

So how does he see the future of sex in games developing? "Sex scenes or at least suggestive scenes with scantily clad beauties will definitely appear in games. If it's appropriate, then why not?"

Of course the question of what's appropriate and what's not is always going to be the kind of debate that ends in

"Sex in games is a sensitive issue, because of the media panics about pornography and its relation to sexual violence"

DR JO BRYCE PSYCHOLOGIST

giggles and innuendo, or Mark Lawson stroking his chin on *The Late Review*.

But even if that wasn't an issue, can we really get our rocks off over a bunch of pixels? Jon Hare explains: "We can get images which are explicit enough with enough detail now actually. We could easily whack up the resolution for certain scenes if we wanted to."

But if you want to get interactive with your playmate so you have the ability to zoom in and out from any angle, then things get complicated: "To animate the human body is the hardest thing," reckons Hare. "If you want to see the subtlety of expression as well as the movement of a couple having sex, technically it's a complex task. We know that from fighting games, where wrestling and grappling are the hardest parts to pull off successfully."

So perhaps holding on is the way to go after all. We're sure that secretly you were all hoping that this article would be able to exclusively reveal that in ten years' time we'll be able to plug ourselves in to our PCs and make love to an accurate representation of Kylie and her sister, but it's just not going to happen in the near future. The nearest we've come so far is a poor approximation (see *Intercourse Interface*, page 35), which is only going to appeal to those with vivid imaginations.

One thing's for sure though, this isn't the end of it. Sex in games is going to be a reality in the future and there's nothing the gutter press is going to be able to do about it. That won't stop them trying though, in fact we can already hear the sounds of pencils being sharpened at the 'Daily Moron'. [22]





Time for another blood test

UPDATE

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Computer Artworks
PUBLISHER Vivendi
WEBSITE www.thethinggames.com
OUT September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Based on a horror classic
- Team-mates display real emotions
- High-pitch paranoia meets gruesome action
- Psychological horror taken to the next level

CV



COMPUTER ARTWORKS

It might only have one other game under its belt, but CA has been around for a decade.

- 1996** The highly impressive software package Organic Art is released to massive sales, allowing you to create weird 3D shapes.
- 2000** The company's organic 3D roots take gameplay form with *Evolva*, a great-looking shooter where you manipulate your characters' DNA.
- 2002** *The Thing* marks a big step for CA and will be released on the major next-generation consoles (except GameCube). Sequels are bound to follow.

THE THING

He's seen the film dozens of times, but now **Mark Hill** finally gets his hands on an early version of the game

WE'RE NOTHING if not thorough in our research here at ZONE Towers. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of John Carpenter's *The Thing* and to prepare for the game of the same name, we locked ourselves up in the office over the weekend with nothing to do but stare at each other's ugly faces and play with a blowtorch and a piece of wire. The air conditioning was turned up to max, the PCs were disconnected and, later on, thrown against the walls. It only took a few hours for the strain to show. Words were said, someone was hit over the head with a chair and paranoia set in as we became convinced at least one of us had been planted by a rival magazine. It ended, inevitably, in bloodshed. And there weren't even any shapeshifting aliens involved.

Computer Artworks' *The Thing* hopes to recreate this experience, replacing the smell of journo sweat with the above-mentioned aliens, a stunning new engine and what could well be one of the biggest innovations games have witnessed in years: trust and fear.

SCAREDY CATS

In case you don't know, the game doesn't attempt to recreate the events from the film. Instead it's set a few months later, as you head the team sent to investigate what happened to the research base. You find little except snow, ruined buildings and charred bodies. Oh, and some voracious heads that run around on legs like giant spiders. But you were expecting that already, weren't you?

The further you dig into the base and what its previous occupants left behind, the bigger and scarier the monsters you encounter become. Then, in a not particularly original twist which echoes *Half-Life*, you discover that soldiers have been sent by the Government to cover it all up and eliminate you and your team, so they can use the alien virus as a weapon. Don't these people ever learn? The advantage of this happening is that you're not confined to shooting ugly critters, there are also plenty of masked-up soldiers to deal with.

While not strictly a squad-based game, at the core of *The Thing* is your



The creatures are truly hideous creations.

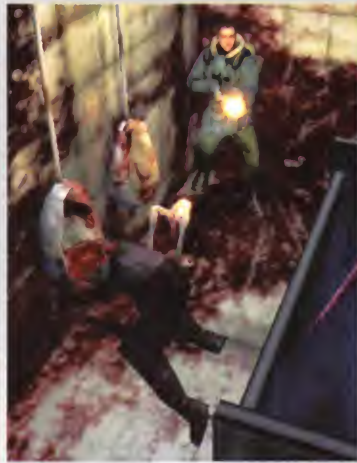
interaction with the team that you're heading in this investigation, which is made up of soldiers, engineers and medics. What makes it really interesting though, is the fact that each of these characters has his own precarious psychological state, one you must take into consideration at all times. They respond to what you do and what they see, and their levels of trust and fear will change accordingly. If their fear reaches a certain level they'll freak out and maybe even commit suicide. And if their trust in you wavers they'll stop obeying your orders or, if they think you're *The Thing*, turn on you.

MOSTLY HUMAN

The crucial element for the success of the game is how well this innovative fear/trust feature is implemented in your team's AI. You really need to feel like these are real



The only way to make certain they're human is to test their blood.



Hope he's wearing his thermal undies.



We can confirm that the engine is a real stunner.

people, if the tension that made the film so great is to be recreated. How they respond to your actions and, and how well they generate fear and mistrust in yourself will determine if you really do become totally involved in the story. It's the difference between the game being nothing more than a nice-looking, third-person shooter (a sort of *Resident Evil* in the snow) and it marking a new high in believable, interactive artificial intelligence.

Even the greatest story- and character-driven games like *Deus Ex* haven't managed to build people around you who can fool you into thinking they're human beings. *The Thing* won't be able to go that far just yet, but if it gets anywhere near, it's a step in the right direction. If it can make you care about the characters around you (really care, as opposed to having a good laugh every time they suffer) it will have achieved something

"A stunning new engine creates what could well be one of the biggest innovations in years: trust and fear"

very few games have – and certainly no action game has managed. And if you feel affection for them, imagine how much worse it will be to see one of them turn on you because they think you're an alien or, even worse, transform into a monster in front of your very eyes, ripping apart the human shell you've been working alongside all this time.

In certain circumstances, losing members of your crew (either to insanity or the alien) will make your life much more difficult, not only reducing your team's firepower, but also depriving you of the way to solve certain puzzles. To work

around this, Computer Artworks is ensuring there will be more than one way to get out of a scrape, and objectives will remain flexible throughout the game.

TARGET ACQUIRED

The game is played from a third-person perspective – as you may have figured out already – and while the controls are similar to an FPS, with a combination of mouse and keyboard, there are a few subtle differences. Running and crouching are both activated as toggles and you can't jump. But the most noticeable change is the absence of an on-screen crosshair,

although this doesn't mean automatic targeting (at least not to a full extent). Instead, there is a targeting mode that shifts perspective to first-person, keeps you still and adds a crosshair. It's a bit odd at first, and an obvious concession to a console's joypad, with *Metal Gear Solid 2* as the main reference point. But if you want to hit those crawling creatures square in the eye and put the right target ablaze with your flame-thrower, you're going to have to get used to it.

An original touch is added by way of using both your hands for separate functions, with each mouse button controlling one. With your right hand you use weapons (machine guns, shotguns, even a handy sniper rifle) while with your left you use other objects (torch, flares, grenades and so on). This means you can hold a flare in one hand while shooting with the other without having to resort to some strange gun-mounted torch.



The terror won't only be visual, it'll be psychological too.

COLD AS HELL

Another console element that's crept into the game is the saving method, which follows the old *Resident Evil* formula, swapping typewriters with tape recorders. You'll only be able to save at these points, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Us PC gamers need to lose that bad habit of saving our game every few seconds.

Since, like *Half-Life*, the whole game takes place in one location, you can't expect too much variety in the environments. The outside setting is

recreated very convincingly, with snowstorms obscuring your vision most of the time and the below zero temperatures decreasing a bodyheat bar with every passing moment. If you don't find shelter every so often you'll freeze to death, adding a time-limit edge to the missions where you have to find a way into locked bases and cabins. These buildings have a bit of a boxy look to them, but are given life by the fact this is the same camp the team in the film lived in. You also get to explore the Norwegian



Some of the larger creatures can only be killed by fire.

base that MacReady visits briefly in the film, complete with carved ice block and Norwegian corpses. One thing you won't be getting from the movie though is Ennio Morricone's brilliant and unnerving score, as the game features its own music.

UNNATURAL ORDER

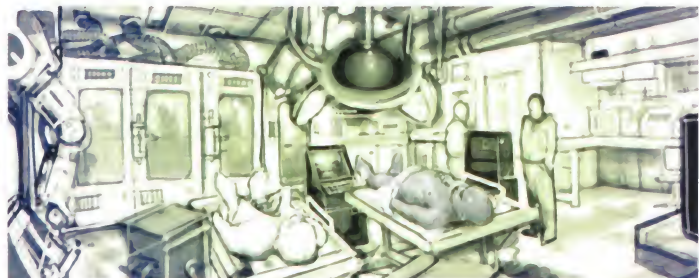
Another important element when commanding a team is the interface. It's no use having a whole set of commands available to you if you have to distract yourself from the action for so long that

you lose interest. As you'd expect from a title that's also being developed for consoles, the interface here is simple, intuitive and a few button taps away.

All you need to do is press the team interface button when you have members of your team around you, and you'll be able to see the health and mental state of each one as well as the weapons they're carrying. You can give them the collective order to follow you or stay put, or click on each guy's face for individual orders. So, if you need an access panel repaired you

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

THE 1984 JOHN CARPENTER MOVIE BOASTED SOME OF THE MOST STAGGERINGLY BIZARRE AND GROTESQUE CREATURES. HOW DO YOU BETTER THAT?



Though the game carries on directly from events in the film, Computer Artworks has tried not to be too restricted in the locations and creatures they've designed. As these images show, they've gone for a more hi-tech feel.



Locations are recognisable, if slightly more covered in gore.



Each level has been designed with an emphasis on claustrophobia.



The UFO made from scrap in the film has been accurately recreated.

It's not *The Thing*, it's a mutant ferret.

get your engineer to go over and fix it. You can also give them weapons and ammo or make them give you theirs. Whether they trust you enough to do so, though, is another matter entirely.

If they don't, you can either try to earn their trust (by sharing ammo, healing them, killing monsters and proving your humanity with a syringe) or, for a quick fix, put a gun to their head and force them to do what you want. Don't turn your back on them if you do that though...

Computer Artworks is already planning sequels. It will be interesting to see how they expand on the premise set out in the film, and whether they will succeed into turning it into some kind of *Aliens*-style franchise. They're already working on a way to create random, free-flowing monsters rather than the stock ones available here. And story-wise, you can easily imagine a scenario where the film's computer prediction about how long it would take for the whole global population to get infected if the alien virus got out was taken to its conclusion. Who knows, maybe all this will inspire John Carpenter to make another film? Actually, let's hope that never happens. Nobody wants another *Ghosts of Mars*. [X]

We're big fans of *The Thing*.

If your team-mates encounter something too upsetting they'll panic.

"If you don't find shelter every so often you'll freeze to death, adding a time-limit edge"

THE HORROR, THE HORROR

WHEN GREAT HORROR FILMS GET RAPED

From what we've seen so far, it looks like Computer Artworks has found the right way to make use of a cult horror licence. It's about time someone did. Below is a look at just how badly some brilliant horror films have been converted in the past.



EVIL DEAD

It doesn't get more 'cult' than Sam Raimi's debut, made with the kind of budget you'd expect for a school project but making up for it with some dazzling camerawork. The game on the other hand is very much like a school project, made for a dying PSone and awfully converted to the PC. Not scary, not funny, but possibly evil and very much dead.

FROM DUSK TILL DAWN

How do you turn Tarantino's rollercoaster vampire ride into a game without losing the clever OTT humour and fantastic characterisations? The answer is that you don't, especially if you're French. *Alone In The Dark* creator Hubert Chardot makes a meal of this one.

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT

The film is a hand-held masterpiece that takes place mostly in the dark, in a tent. The game is a regurgitated third-person shooter with lots of monsters to kill and no tents at all. You figure it out. The perfect example of how to turn subtle psychological terror into dumb, annoying action.



Different haunting techniques are needed depending on who you have to scare.

Who you gonna call?

GHOST MASTER

Things going bump in the night? *Rhianna Pratchett* ain't scared of no ghost

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sick Puppies
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
WEBSITE www.empireinteractive.com
OUT Q4 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Genuinely innovative game concept
- Ground-breaking AI in a fully 3D environment
- Over 50 ghosts with more than 150 haunting powers at your disposal
- Full of humour and devilish enjoyment

THESE DAYS it seems to be getting harder and harder to find developers who are prepared to risk their necks, not to mention a great deal of cash, by releasing genuinely new ideas into a fickle marketplace. OK, so they might be pushing the envelope when it comes to graphics, but as far as gameplay is concerned, it's surprising the number of envelopes that get lost under the fridge. Enter *Ghost Master*, a spook 'em up sim from Oxford-based developers Sick Puppies and one of the most innovative games at E3 this year.

It's impossible to put *Ghost Master* into any specific gaming genre as it takes bits and pieces from practically every arena, bar FPS and sports. "The beauty of *Ghost Master* is that it appeals to both hardcore and casual gamers," claims Sick Puppies founder Greg Barnett. "God game, resource management, sim, strategy or even adventure gamers looking for something a little different will love *Ghost*, as will players of

The Sims looking for something with a little more edge to it. Even non-gamers who like reality shows may enjoy it, and almost certainly those that don't like reality shows will too! It's the sort of game everybody should try because you just never know who it will appeal to."

NO REST FOR THE WICKED

Whether it will appeal to fans of *The Sims* is yet to be seen, but it should certainly appeal to those who hate them: this game is about as anti-*Sim* as you can get. Ever wanted to drive those bland little simmy characters insane? Scare them out of their three-piece-suite loving minds? Bigger up their relationships and send them screaming into the night? Well that's what *Ghost Master* is all about.

You play an undead civil servant, sent to the town of Gravenville to sort out some problems of an other-worldly nature. You play through a series of scenarios which revolve around haunted locations all titled with suitably ghoulish

CV

SICK PUPPIES

As this is the first game from Sick Puppies, we take a look back at some of the titles the team behind *Ghost Master* have worked on in the past.

1983 *Hungry Horace* was a Spectrum classic in the good old-fashioned style of *Pac-Man*. You worked your way through mazes in a park, eating flowers, packed lunches and scaring the park guards. They don't make 'em like that anymore.

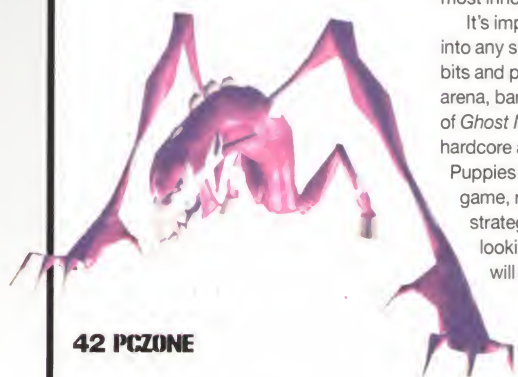
1984 Like the name says, in *Horace Goes Skiing*, Horace goes skiing, braving the dangers of road crossing (always dangerous) and slalom ski courses.

1985 *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* was undoubtedly the best beat 'em up on the Spectrum. The object was to compete against the computer or another player, trying to reach tenth dan.

1995 *Discworld* saw you controlling the inept wizard Rincewind, superbly voiced by Eric Idle. This one was the first, soon to be followed by two sequels.

1996 *Discworld II* has a great scenario: death has gone on holiday, and Rincewind must find a way of getting him to come back. Much better animation and graphics than the first time around.

1999 *Discworld Noir* was much darker than the previous *Discworld* games and a lot less surreal. One of the last genuinely good point-and-click adventures.





The squiggle above the human's heads shows you how scared they are.

puns – things like Deadfellas, Train Spooking and Ghoul, Interrupted. Each of the locations contains various mortals, be they a family, mafia bosses or scantily-clad young women in a sorority house. The locations will also have a number of 'local' ghosts, which are the spirits of people that have died there. The object of the levels is to use your team of up to eight ghosts and try and scare, manipulate and trick

the mortals into helping you lay the local spirits to rest, usually by solving some mystery surrounding their deaths. Once they're at peace, they'll join your team.

THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

To achieve your goals you'll have to resort to a lot of general scaring. After all, where would ghosts be without fear? The more you scare people, the more plasm you'll build up, which allows you to cast bigger and better haunting



Prepare to be haunted.

spells. Plus it also allows you to gradually upgrade your ghosts to the level of superghost. There are between 50-60 spooks in the game, which are split into 21 ghost 'families' including Frighteners, Disturbances and Reflection, and they have some 150 haunting powers between them. Most of the ghosts can only inhabit or be 'bound' to the mortal world in certain areas, such as electric objects or murder sites. Certain ghosts such as poltergeists can even bind to children, so that everywhere the child goes strange

Q&A

GREG BARNETT



The founder of Sick Puppies and master of ghosts himself, Greg Barnett, gives PC ZONE the lowdown on all things ghostly.

PCZ What sort of challenges will gamers face?

GREG First and foremost they must use their ghosts wisely to build up the level of fear in a given scenario. Usually there is little fear to start with and therefore little plasm (the resource that ghosts use to cast their powers). Players must find out what different people are afraid of and target them accordingly.

PCZ Where have you taken your influences from?

GREG *Ghost Master* draws from everything ghostly in every form of media, but particularly movies. Scenarios are more often than not based on very loose parodies of well-known (and occasionally obscure) films. We have *The Blair Wisp Project*, set in a forest, *Calamityville* and *Poultrygeist*, in a big old house. *Deadfellas* is set on a mafia owned-ship, *The Abysmal* on a shipwreck below the sea, *Trainspooking* on a train, *Ghoul, Interrupted* and *What Lies Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, set in a hospital and asylum. *Weird Seance* is set in a frat house, *The Unusual Suspects* in a police station and *Facepacks* and *Broomsticks* in a sorority house (because this just wouldn't be a game without screaming cheerleaders!).

PCZ What are the most innovative aspects of *Ghost Master*?

GREG This game was designed from the start with innovation in mind, from the underlying concept of controlling ghosts rather than people, right through to the unique control mechanism that literally puts the world in the palm of your hand. Innovation is also present in AI that encourages emergent behaviour and a dynamically created horror movie score.

PCZ What would you say was your favourite gameplay aspect?

GREG I'd like to say it was the nicely balanced strategy elements. In reality it's the quick thrill you get from scaring the living daylight out of mortals – like sorority girls – with all manner of horrific and ghostly effects.

“You play an undead civil servant, sent to the town of Gravenville to sort out other-worldly problems”



The design is more *GhostBusters* than *The Exorcist*.

"You can make rooms go cold or possess a toaster, child's play to the ultra-scary stuff such as making walls bleed"



The locations are very well-drawn and fully of detail.

things happen and the parents start getting that 'Perhaps we shouldn't have called him Damien' feeling.

The various ways you can scare people and manipulate them look like being one of the most ingenious aspects of the game. You can make rooms go

cold or possess a toaster, both of which are child's play compared to the ultra-scary stuff such as making walls bleed or creating hordes of ghostly insects.

However, there are some threats to your ghosts in the mortal world. These include sceptics, who do their best to

decrease belief in the paranormal, and student witches who will try and ward them off. But you can fight back, and a well-timed ghostly apparition at a student witches' seance will have them chewing their black nail polish off. It's all deliciously evil.

There are two things that there aren't enough of in gaming at the moment, and that's innovation and humour. It doesn't seem a lot to ask for, but *Ghost Master* looks like it's going to deal us a healthy hand of both. This could be the start of a ghoultiful relationship. **[X]**

SPOOKS, SPECTRES AND SPIRITUAL APPARITIONS

FORGET THE ADDAMS FAMILY, THIS POSSE OF PHANTOMS WILL SCARE THE BEJESUS OUT OF YOU



GREMLINS

These are the spirits of animals that have died in machinery. Like Cogjammer the organ grinder's monkey, who unfortunately got a bit too close to the organ. Incredibly mischievous, and cheap to maintain, these ghosts can be bound to electric objects.



PHANTOMS

Phantoms thrive on emotional energy and therefore can be bound to sites of emotional disturbances – particularly a murder. As they gain power they turn into a superghost known as a phantasms, which have a powerful arsenal of haunting spells.



TRICKSTERS

In their initial form tricksters are similar to gremlins in that they're animal spirits with a penchant for naughtiness. When they level up to a superghost they become shape-changers, and can shapeshift themselves into the form of any creature they meet.



FETCH

These spirits inhabit mirrors and can not only change people's reflections, but also in their more powerful form as doppelgänger, they can create physical clones of the people that look in the mirror. Great for creating emotional disturbances among mortals.

Can't wait? Don't wait!



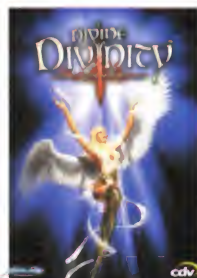
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Divine Divinity
Release: 02-Aug 2002
ASP £29.99
Code: RM0705 **£27.99**



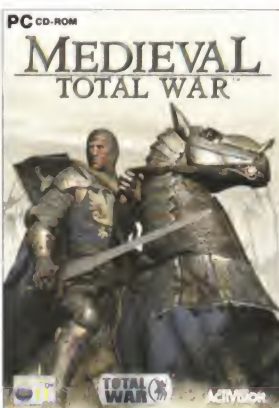
Tactical Ops
Release: 30-Aug 2002
ASP £24.99
Code: RM0606 **£19.99**



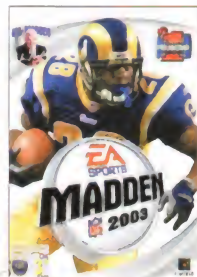
Sudden Strike 2
Release: 30-Aug 2002
ASP £34.99
Code: RM0706 **£28.99**



Aliens vs Predator 2
Primal Hunt
Release: 16-Aug 2002
ASP £19.99
Code: RM0616 **£17.99**



Medieval Total War
Release: 30-Aug 2002
ASP £34.99
Code: RM0612 **£29.99**



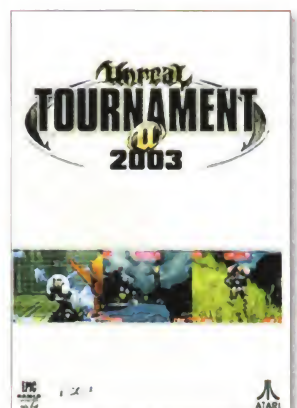
Madden NFL 2003
Release: 30-Aug 2002
ASP £29.99
Code: RM0671 **£28.99**



Mafia
Release: 26-July 2002
ASP £29.99
Code: RM3869 **£26.99**



Quake 3 Gold
Release: 09-Aug 2002
ASP £19.99
Code: RM0669 **£16.99**



Unreal Tournament 2003
Release: 02-Aug 2002
ASP £34.99
Code: RM0604 **£26.99**

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UPDATE

Steve O'Hagan gets battered on strong lager, snogs a bush-pig and pukes all over the sun-lounger

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Deep Red
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.eidos.co.uk
OUT End of August

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Recreate that holiday where you pulled that slapper from Dagenham
- It looks like a game for all the family yet features rampant fornication
- Simulates seven hour vertical drinking sessions
- Very, very funny

"**THIS IS A** game about behaving badly on holiday." The words of Ian Livingstone, living legend and the brains behind *Beach Life*, and a succinct summation of the antics you can expect in Eidos's new sun, sand and sangria simulator. Only we'd like to suggest a change to that statement. Try putting the word 'very' in front of badly.

Drunken bints in ill-fitting bikinis bitch-brawling outside tacky theme pubs. Men staggering out of night-clubs to brazenly urinate like horses up against the nearest burger stall. Men and women copping off for alcohol-fuelled romps in the sand dunes. Men and men copping off for alcohol-fuelled romps in the sand dunes. The gamut of debauchery laid bare. The entire spectrum of 'Brits on the Piss' loutishness unfolding on your monitor.

Think *Theme Park* set in Torremolinos. You are running a resort. There are beautiful sandy beaches. There are magnificent cliffs and rocky out-crops. Palm trees and Mediterranean flora cover the hills. But you've got a ferryload of 20-something holiday hedonists



inbound, intent on having the time of their lives. Time to cover the beaches with sun-loungers and barbeques, wreck the cliffy vistas with hi-rise hotel blocks and bulldoze the vegetation to make way for discos, sweaty bars and over-priced restaurants.

BALEARIC BEATS

The game is broken into missions, and goals range from making a certain amount of cash, to cleaning up the reams of litter that are turning your resort into an ill-kept dustbin. Crucial to achieving any of this is keeping your fun-seekers happy while simultaneously relieving them of their money to fund your grand designs. Achieving the latter seems, on the face of it, not particularly difficult. Lower the price of beer a little, and watch them flock to your beach bar. Increase the strength of the stuff and watch them throng the convenience stores the next day, paying through the nose for headache pills.

Build cafes and beach barbeques to flog food throughout the day, and restaurants to keep the punters' bellies full during the night. Erect enormous superclubs to keep your visitors awake



Crowded pubs can become battlefields.



Beach disco: how come we've never pulled at one?



Night is the time for lovers.

and spending money for as many hours as possible. Build discos on the beach or moor party yachts off the shore – you are not exactly short of ways of separating holidaymakers from their de niro.

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BEACH

Keeping them happy is another matter. From the cleanliness of the beach to the cleanliness of the babes sunbathing on it, there are plenty of factors to bear in mind. To keep tabs on your guests' moods, you need only click on any one of them to get a total breakdown on what makes them tick. From their name, to how drunk they are, to how full their bladder is, there's little you can't find out about these tiny, digitised holiday makers.

"Couples troop down to the dunes where they brazenly romp in the sand"

Different guests will have different priorities, though number one for most is nookie. A quick check on a visitor's totty meter shows whether they think that the place is heaving with classy crumpet, or whether it is crawling with boilers. To encourage more fellas in, you play to the lowest macho denominator by increasing the amount of jet skis there are to bugger about on, and the number of bars there are to get bladdered in. For the womenfolk, it's the likes of prime sunbathing space and top-notch swimming pools that will draw them in.

Then, a swift reduction in the price of Cape Horn lager (an alcoholic aphrodisiac) and you can stand back and watch cupid do his work. And as ever, the act of love is a beautiful thing to behold.

Day is turning to night. The bars are thronging with revellers, now changed out of their bikinis and swimming shorts into even more indiscreet and revealing night-time clobber. The night grows long and conversations turn to flirting, and flirting turns to tongue-wrestling in the bushes and on the benches outside the boozier. Couples pair off and troop down to the dunes where they romp brazenly in the sand. It would be erotic but for the fact the girls are the size of the nail on your little finger.

"YOU SPILL MY PINT?"

Different kinds of beer produce different reactions in your guests. Fighting, flirting, having fun or just getting rat-arsed. Whatever you want your guests to feel, you can make it happen merely by changing the grog your bars are punting.

But the holiday makers aren't the only people you need to take care of, there's also your staff. The cleaners are pissed off because you've got them working through the night cleaning up piles of puke on minimum wage. Or your security guard's got the hump because you've dropped the

price of fighting lager and he's the only one there to deal with the brawls breaking out. And with shark attacks, heat waves and hurricanes all a feature, taking care of your guest's obsessions is only half the battle.

So forget Ayia Napa, Ibiza and Rhodes, as this is going to make them seem like a wet weekend at Butlins. *Beach Life* offers the best of Mediterranean hedonism, minus Germans with towels. **PC**

LIFE'S A BEACH

FIVE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT 18-30



It's no secret that *Beach Life* is inspired by the antics of those over-sexed, under-paid reps who shagged their way through several series' of reality fly-on-the wall documentaries, right down to the blissed-out, pumping soundtrack. So, in a fit of uncharacteristically professional research, we dug up some facts about the real thing so you can judge how close the makers of *Beach Life* are to the mark.

1. Club 18-30 was founded in 1965 by a bloke called David Heard who realised that for the first time young people had disposable income.
2. In 1995, Club 18-30 had a poster campaign banned. With slogans such as 'Beaver España', 'Something deep inside her said she'd come again,' and 'Wake up at the crack of Dawn...or Lisa, or Julie,' we're not surprised.
3. Emma Bunton, Davina Murphy and Emma B have all been linked to the lead role in a film about Club 18-30 reps rumoured to be in the planning stages. God help us.
4. Club 18-30 Rep Becky Assemakis boasted of sleeping with 20 men in 12 hours one night in Rhodes. We hope the last fella had his wooden spoon with him to stir the porridge.
5. 72 per cent of 18-30 customers come from either the North West or South East while only 6 per cent come from Scotland.



The imaginative setting has got us in a lather.



You'd have to put a bag over her head first.

20,000 leagues above the sea

PROJECT NOMADS

Jules Verne and islands in the sky. Steve O'Hagan goes wandering

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Radon Labs
PUBLISHER CDV
WEBSITE www.project-nomads.de
OUT Q4 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Exquisite visuals and great arcane-technology design
- Innovative setting making a change from the usual RTS fare
- Action/strategy hybrid

CV



CDV

Radon Labs have only been going for a couple of years and *Project Nomads* is its first game. The company was formed in Berlin from the core of the team who designed *Urban Assault* for Terratech together with help from Hahnfilm, a leading German animation company.

1998 *Urban Assault* is released by Microsoft

2000 Radon Labs founded in Berlin by most of the team behind *Urban Assault*

2001 *Project Nomads* wins Best PC Game of Show award at London's ECTS.

2002 *Project Nomads* is released to universal acclaim. Oh, we're jumping the gun a bit on that one.

THE RTS GENRE is in a wee bit of a rut as far as originality is concerned. Take your pick from any number of fantasy and sci-fi clones, from the reams of ancient history based doppelgangers, and more recently from the glut of WW2 themed battlers. Where's the inspiration for the next far-sighted, trailblazing envelope-pusher going to come from, then? The most unlikely of sources, as far as Radon Labs, developers of intriguing looking 3D action/RTS *Project Nomads* is concerned: the works of a largely forgotten author, an area in central Europe, and some weird dreams.

"The inspiration comes from the most eastern part of Germany, which is where Radon Labs is based," says Friis Tappert, a producer on the game. "The books of

Jules Verne were also an obvious influence, along with the common dream of flying." Hmm. What about that dream where all your teeth fall out and the one where the 'woman' you were just 'loving' turns into a man? To deny these is to deny oneself.

Returning, if you've not caught any of our coverage up to now, here's an overview. *Project Nomads* is set in a world where an apocalyptic war with an insectoid alien race known as the Skrits has broken the land into a myriad of islands, which now float forlornly through the clouds.

The survivors of this cataclysm are few, led by the Nomads, wandering sorcerers gifted with the power of flight. As a Nomad, it is your task to rally against the alien invaders who have taken



Jump in the cockpit for some dogfighting WWI style.

such but no ground units. But the enemy – the Skrits – do have ground units, so players will encounter them,” continues Friis.

HANDS OFF

Radon Labs are keen to keep micromanagement to a minimum, allowing the player to concentrate more on the two fundamental elements of strategy and action.

“There is only one resource to collect: energy. And one technology: artefacts. Juggling the artefacts, managing the energy and replacing and repairing things are the only real micromanagement facets of the game,” says Friis. “Each vehicle and building has a certain artefact. The player has to find them, trade them in the market place or earn them through completing missions.”

This emphasis away from swamping the player with onerous tasks also stretches to the unit balance.

Friis adds: “Each hanger can only house a single aircraft, which keeps unit numbers low. Since the player does not manage units but operates from his central base – or his islands – everything is normally in his sight. The player can switch through all controllable objects by simply pressing a button.

This is not a mass-unit game meaning the player is always in control.”

PROPELLER HEADS

And though the game plays out as a traditional RTS, and it's possible to win battles without getting your hands dirty, the onus is on getting directly involved with the fighting to tip the balance.

“It will be very, very hard to win battles without getting personally involved in some way. Certain vehicles and buildings such as the basic guntower will not function at all if not manned by the player. But most, including all the aircraft and more advanced guntowers are automated and will fire of their own accord. But objects controlled by the player have a little boost to them to ensure players do not get lazy. Upgrading all your stuff to make it auto-controlled costs you and will mean you have fewer units. It's your call...” says Friis.

Interesting, says us. And what with a single-player campaign comprising four chapters, that encompass 31 missions, three playable characters, each with a unique set of units and buildings to construct, it looks like having its fair share of meat too. Expect a review in a few months. [\[E\]](#)

The insectoid Skrit are your main adversary in *Project Nomads*.

“With only small armies at your disposal, lending a hand at the right moment in combat will be vital”

advantage of the situation to try and conquer what's left of your people.

ARCANE TECHNOLOGIES

As mentioned, this world is a Jules Verne/H G Wells style piece of Victorian gothic imagination. Automated factories that spew fire out of towering smoke stacks. Turbine generators that supply power. Steam-driven gun turrets that fight

off enemy attacks by lumbering Zeppelins and whirring biplanes.

The standard vehicle in this airborne world, unsurprisingly, is the aircraft. Big or small, as long as they look like something that was drawn up around the turn of the last century, they're here.

So no ground combat at all? “No, no grunts or tanks – players have access to a huge variety of planes, gun turrets and

ISLAND HOPPING

HERE'S A PRIMER ON ELEMENTARY NOMADS TACTICS

ISLAND HOPPING

Moving your island around and judging the right distance to position it is vital. If you are too far away you may not be able to launch effective attacks. If you are too close you may feel the might of his defensive weaponry.

ATTACK OR DEFENCE

Decide on a strategic approach and make sure you support it with your building decisions. You can power up your island, concentrating on building up its defensive armaments and emplacements, or you can turn it into

little more than a launching platform for your attack forces.

ORGANISATION

Haphazard town planning will get you nowhere as space is always limited. Build as many factories and offensive structures as you can in order to gain military superiority this way. But remember that a well-placed enemy attack on your energy sources could cripple you. The other option you have is to build a surplus of energy collectors to ensure you have a strong infrastructure to withstand a prolonged siege.



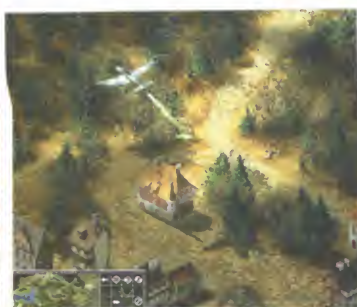
Taking over enemy islands should pose some interesting tactical conundrums.



Buildings now offer multiple levels, but the higher you post your troops, the greater the chance they might cop it if the building collapses.



There are 50 missions and over 50 units, which is quite a lot.



Use tunnels to plan surprise attacks from below.

The ceasefire has broken...

SUDDEN STRIKE II

Richie Shoemaker has lost his desk job and been shipped to the front

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Fireglow

PUBLISHER CDV

WEBSITE www.suddenstrike.de

OUT August

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Combines WWII setting with fast-paced RTS action – without the resource management.
- The original game transformed publisher CDV from a peddler of interactive soft porn to a pan-European gaming superpower.
- Command practically every piece of kit or unit ever deployed during WWII. Except atom bombs.
- The Russkies, Limeys, Yanks and Jemies are back, plus you can take control of the Japs as well. Sadly the Italians have been overlooked once again.

HERE IS A question every games publisher in the world would love to hear the answer to: what compels people to spend their hard earned money on a particular computer game? An advert? An informative, entertaining and grammatically impeccable review by yours truly, perhaps? Word of mouth? The answer, I'll wager, is a combination of all these things. But there are moments – admit it now, we've all had them – when you're standing in a shop. The game you've been wanting for months hasn't been released and 30 quid is burning a hole in your pocket and you've somehow convinced yourself that to leave empty-handed would be an embarrassing failure. So you end up buying a game you've never heard of, not in this case because the words 'One cannot play war, grandpa says' are printed on the back of the box, but because on the front, some magazine is saying: 'One of the finest WWII games ever made'.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

Despite the atrocious packaging, *Sudden Strike* was a hit. Hence the inevitable sequel, which like the original game is concerned with picking one of WWII's major powers and going about the

destruction of the enemy in time-honoured RTS fashion – select loads of tanks, then click where the enemy is.

Of course there's much more to it than that, and as before, *Sudden Strike II* takes a sidestep away from regular real-time strategy games like *C&C*, in that you no longer have to worry about collecting resources or building units. What you see is what you get and what you get you must make best use of.

"It takes a sidestep away from regular real-time strategy games like *C&C*"

Returning this time are a bewildering array of German and Allied units, but this time players will also be able to take charge of the Imperial Japanese forces and fight across SE Asia and the Pacific Islands. New tanks, trucks, soldiers and aircraft will be introduced for the first time, and players will also be able to direct armoured trains, landing craft and even destroyers.

BUSH WAR

As well as shifting the realism up a gear (and introducing difficulty levels for those

of us that found the original a bit too much of a challenge), Russian developer Fireglow has added a few other new features worthy of note. Graphically, little has changed, but there are plenty of lovely new touches: the terrain is much more varied and the fog of war adjusts to reflect that. Hide your troops in the bushes for example and although they may be out of view of the enemy, they probably won't see very much

themselves. You can order grouped units to stick to formation, travel at the same speed and if you need to get troops to the front line quickly, you can order them to clamber onto your tanks rather than use trucks.

Already out in Germany, there have been a few voices of dissent about the 2D isometric graphics, but we happen to quite like them. You can expect an informative, entertaining and grammatically impeccable review of the full English version of *Sudden Strike II* next issue. [EW]

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The question you should be asking is: where are the brakes?

To infinity and...

ONLINE ONLY

BETA TEST

EARTH AND BEYOND

Space combat, trading and exploration meet in Westwood's debut online role-player.
Richie Shoemaker blasts off with the beta testers

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Westwood Studios
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.earthandbeyond.com
OUT September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Anything by Westwood is worth a close look
- Will be the first decent attempt at an accessible online RPG
- No goblins, no enchanted swords and no players calling themselves Flintanvil Steelheart



CV

WESTWOOD STUDIOS

Still going after 15 years, Westwood Studios is better known for the *Command & Conquer* series. They've done a few role-playing games in their time though.

1990 Ride dragons in the AD&D universe in *DragonStrike* – 3D as well.

1993 *Lands Of Lore: Throne Of Chaos* – Tile-based role-player in the Dungeon Master stylee.

1997 *Lands Of Lore II: Guardians Of Destiny* was more of the same, only a bit more modern.

1999 *Lands Of Lore III* – as above.

2000 Westwood tried to out-*Diablo Diablo* with *Nox* but didn't quite pull it off.

EARTH AND BEYOND

is unlike most other online role-playing games. It is set in a distant future rather than a fantasy past. It doesn't kick off by overwhelming you with endless stats and boring you with weeks of mundane, soul-destroying tasks. It gets you out where the action is right away. It's aimed at a broad audience, unlike the recent *Anarchy Online* or the potentially decent *Neocron* (see page 55). But then maybe none of this is so surprising when you consider *Command & Conquer* creator Westwood is behind it.

Now, before we go any further it is worth mentioning that although *Earth And Beyond* looks like a space combat game, it doesn't play like traditional space combat games such as *X-Wing* or *Wing Commander*. The game is almost entirely mouse driven and success in combat depends exclusively on the skills your

character has built up rather than on your own dexterity with the controls. Fans of games such as *Freespace* or *Elite* may well be a little disappointed at this, but in its defence the game has much more to it than combat.

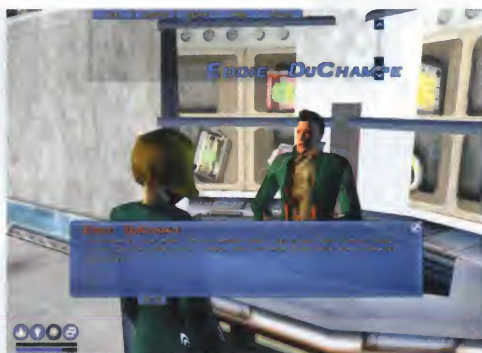
KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Customising your character and your ship is one of *Earth And Beyond's* strengths. Despite its aim of trying to get people playing quickly, you can spend a good couple of hours picking out foreheads and tattoos for your character or choosing a nice green hull for your ship. None of this has any effect on the gameplay of course, but not having to wade through stats and skill tables and having only to concentrate on your appearance makes the game feel that much more inviting.

To keep things simple there are only three races in the game, each offering a



Ship movement is a bit sluggish.



A face only a mother could love.



For a game just reach beta stage, it's remarkably stable.

choice of only three professions; trader, warrior or explorer. Picking a side will depend primarily on what you want to be. Although it may just have as much to do with aesthetics as anything else since your choice of race and profession will dictate what ship you will have. And as much as I wanted to be a Progen Warrior, there was no way I was going to fly something that looked like it had been fashioned out of Duplo bricks by a two-year-old. I have standards, you know.

BATTLE HARDENED

A couple of ridiculous looking spaceships aside, *Earth And Beyond* is a very good looking game. Each system is populated with jump gates, asteroids, planets, space stations, some bizarre alien jellyfish and the occasional spatial anomaly. As space games go, the world of *Earth And Beyond* is incredibly varied and packed with detail. More importantly, even at this pre-release stage it is incredibly stable, although at the moment the game isn't particularly heavily populated. After about eight hours playing time I've only come across a handful of human players.

Having not had much chance to engage in combat it is difficult to gauge how battles will be conducted, but having

"Earth And Beyond represents a brave step into the unknown, and for thousands of potential online gamers there is much to look forward to"

played a couple of training missions combat seems to be wildly oversimplified. It's a case of clicking on a potential target and if it's at your level, you just keep pressing the key that corresponds to the weapon you want to fire until you win. The fact that death doesn't have much consequence in the game adds even less urgency to the battles, but again I must admit to having very little experience so far. At the moment it looks like the battles later on are much more tactical than they first appear, as specialist skills and equipment have a much greater bearing on the outcome.

BRAVE NEW WORLDS

As is typical with most Westwood games *Earth And Beyond* is deceptively simple, yet one would imagine hard to master and finely balanced all round. Less typical of the famous Las Vegas codeshop is that *E&B* boasts plenty of original features,

not least of which is the fact that as well as space combat and exploration, you can dock at any of the game's stations and walk around the interior on foot, meet up with other players, hit the bar, pick up a mission or just head for the trading floor. It all adds another level of interaction to the game, which together with the easy-to-use communications, should prove popular.

As *Earth And Beyond* isn't even considered to be at the beta stage, it's impressive that it's already as stable as some established online games. Not all the ships are in yet, and the full depth of the game's story won't be explored until it is released later this year, but there's already much here that sets it apart. For Westwood, *Earth & Beyond* represents a brave step into the unknown, and for thousands of potential online gamers who until now have been sidelined due to a lack of titles, there is much to look forward to. Hopefully Westwood will charge a realistic rate for the game because with *Star Wars Galaxies* on the way (as well as a space expansion pack), *Earth And Beyond* could be left behind very quickly. [P]

A GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND?

WHAT'S TO COME IN THE WORLD OF SPACE-BASED GAMES

Although *Earth And Beyond* won't be the first space-based online role-playing game, it's certain to be the biggest for some time. Perhaps the biggest threat to its dominance comes from *Eve Online: Second Genesis* (www.eve-online.com), a similar game by all accounts, which should be available by the end of the year. *Jumpgate* (www.mightygames.co.uk) is still alive and kicking and very good it is too, especially if traditional space combat and *Elite*-style trading is more your cup of tea. Then of course there is *Star Wars Galaxies* (www.starwarsgalaxies.com), which will without a doubt be the biggest online game the world has seen. Unfortunately for *Earth & Beyond*, *Galaxies* will get its first expansion pack in about a year, and with it *Galaxies* players will be able to fly X-Wings and shuttles and even trade furs from Endor, we hope.

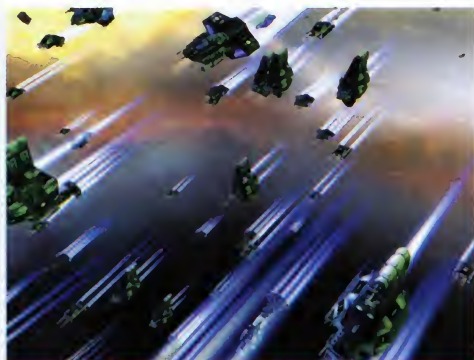
SPACE RACE



There will be three races to pick from, each offering three professions.

CULTURED, GREEDY OR WARRIOR-LIKE – THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Three playable races to choose from and they all hate each other – nothing new there. However, one refreshing aspect of *Earth And Beyond* is that all three races are more or less human. The Terrans are perhaps the most human, prone to greed and specialists at trading. The Progen are the genetically modified warrior race based around Mars, while the Jenquai are the specialists in exploration, who like to think of themselves as cultured and live around Jupiter way.



Each race offers distinct ships to fly.



That's a lot of spare ships. *O.R.B.* features some mightily impressive space armadas.

Groovy armadas

O.R.B.

Time to squeeze into the space admiral's chair once more. **Steve O'Hagan** tightens his asteroid belt

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Strategy First
PUBLISHER Strategy First
WEBSITE www.o-r-b.com
OUT Q3 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Orbiting playing area
- Enormous battle-fleets
- Completely modable

STRATEGY games used to use maps as flat as this sheet of A4 magazine paper. Then the 3D space combat RTS came along and terms such as 'North', 'South' and 'at the bottom of the map' ceased to exist, replaced with such concepts as 'three-dimensional co-ordinates', the 'z-axis' and 'rotations around the plane'. *O.R.B.* is one of these sci-fi geometry/strategy fusions, and hopes to blast genre-leading *Homeworld* right out of the solar system.

ASTEROIDS

The game is set in a universe devastated by war where the aggressive Malus and the cultured Alyssians fight for possession of mineral-rich asteroid belts. Not only are these celestial bodies something to look at in the otherwise fairly monotonous black of space, but crucially they provide something to get your bearings from in the 3D playing world and are also the source of your resources.

"The asteroid field design was inspired by *The Empire Strikes Back*, the best of the *Star Wars* movies," says associate producer Paul Gadbois. We are immediately warming to this guy. So how does a typical game kick off? "You build a Science Vessel and have it scan the asteroid belt until it finds resources. You send a team to dig into it and transport units carry the resources to the closest military base."

Nice. But here's the interesting bit: "Orbiting mining bases go around the system and you need to keep track of bases or else you'll lose them to the enemy when they go near enemy territory. You can upgrade old mining plants into covert military bases and from there launch surprise attacks."

SPACE INVADERS

OK, that's the resource collecting, how about the fighting?

"There are more than 20 unique units per race (well over 50 in the game) from marines that can board disabled enemy craft, to huge carriers built in giant shipyards. You can command up to 100 ships in the single-player game (it could have been more but we support PIII 500

systems) and anywhere up to around 200 ships in multiplayer.

"The online community will have all the tools necessary to create their own mods and nearly every object can be modified. The powerful campaign editor also lets you script in-game cut-scenes, including custom music and sound effects."

So if you love epic space battles and real-time strategy, and have the ability to visualise the cosmos as a spatially-interrelated whole, then this could be the game for you. But if you find remembering where you are in relation to the remote control in your living room a hard enough feat of cranial cartography, the control deck of a command ship in *O.R.B.*'s dazzling mix of Pythagoras and proton torpedoes may prove a bridge too far. **EW**

"The asteroid field design was inspired by *The Empire Strikes Back*, the best of the *Star Wars* movies"



We had an idea for a game set in a haemorrhoid field called *P.R.O.B.E.*



Unique monsters and futuristic weaponry. We like.



Meet at the Neofrag centre for one-on-one shootouts with other players.

The online RPG that's gone off the radar

NEOCRON

UPDATE

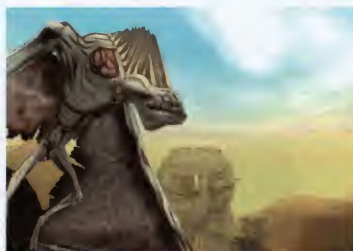
Heading up the search party: **Chris Anderson**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Reakktor
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
WEBSITE www.neocron.com
OUT TBC

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Blade Runner* meets online RPG
- Vehicles that can be bought and upgraded
- The first viable alternative to *Anarchy Online*



Is this the beginning of the end for *Anarchy Online*?

IT'S THE GAME online RPG fans have been waiting for patiently. It's the game that promises to revolutionise its genre with a unique combat system and vastly improved player clan setup. In short, it promises to be 'the next big thing' when it arrives, but as of yet, it's nowhere to be seen. We asked Jens Bremmekamp, community support manager for *Neocron*, how the beta test was going.

"It's had its up and downs, but mainly because of organisational problems, not because of the game itself. *Neocron* is actually coming along very well. Now we have completed the demo and the new trailer, we can once again fully concentrate on the game. We plan to have it complete prior to the start of the next beta stage. The next (and probably last) stage will then consist of bug-fixing until release."

MENTAL ATHLETICS

While many gamers will be looking forward to *Neocron*'s upgradeable vehicles, there are always concerns about the combat



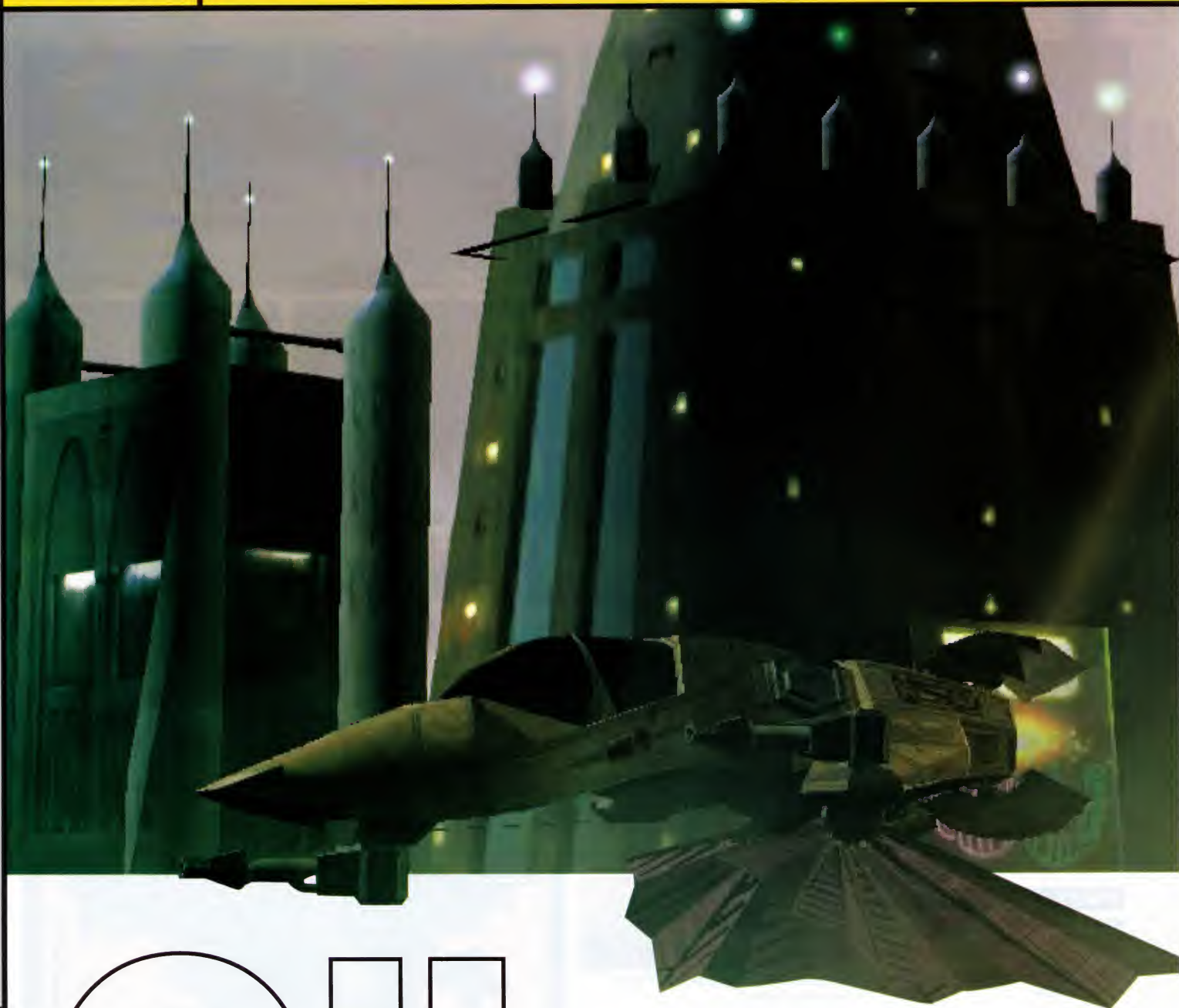
As you can tell from the world map, *Neocron* will be pretty damned big.

side of the game which, it is hoped, will not amount to simply pressing the attack button as is the case with most current online RPGs. Jens is confident they can avoid this: "The combat system is much more intuitive than in other games of this kind. You don't have to go through a mouse-click orgy to change your equipment, you don't just switch to something like combat mode and wait till you or your opponent drops dead. Instead you can draw your favourite weapon with one keystroke. You have to aim at your opponent and adjust your aim throughout the battle and you have to pull the trigger yourself. It all appears very much like a FPS, but that's mainly because FPSs have

an intuitive combat system, not because we want *Neocron* to be a MMOFPS. We do not. It'll be a fully-fledged MMORPG, nothing more, nothing less."

It all sounds very promising, and if the screen shots on this page are any indication of how the final game will look, *Neocron* will be as much a visual treat as it is a gaming innovation. Let's hope Reakktor can avoid the launch nightmare that plagued *Anarchy Online* when it was released, as a smooth launch is becoming increasingly crucial to the success of new titles in this genre. You can be sure *PC ZONE* will be at hand to give you the lowdown on the *Neocron* launch as soon as it happens. **PCZ**

"The combat system is much more intuitive than in other games of this kind"



Freelancer

NEUMANN, what's your game?

FREELANCER

The most anticipated space combat sim of all time is finally nearing completion. *Martin Korda* goes stateside to get the latest from lead designer Jorg Neumann

PROFILE

JORG NEUMANN

DEVELOPER: Jorg Neumann**POSITION:** Lead designer**WHAT'S THE EXCUSE FOR FREELANCER TAKING SO LONG?**

Whenever you try something innovative, you want to get it right. Nothing would be more devastating than putting out a game that doesn't live up to its promise. We just want to make it the best game it can be.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Anvil
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com
OUT Christmas 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Massive free-form universe to explore
- Intriguing plot
- Co-operative multiplayer for up to 16 players
- Dozens of professions to pursue
- Multiple factions to align yourself with

CV



DIGITAL ANVIL

Founded in 1996, Digital Anvil was the brainchild of the now legendary Chris Roberts, but the company soon found itself without its founding member as he moved into movie making. However, after a slightly shaky start, the company is now emerging as the leading light in space-based games.

2000 *Starlancer*: Reviewed by yours truly, this was an excellent if limited space-combat game, with some great co-operative multiplayer options, which sadly, never took off.

2001 *Conquest Frontier Wars*: A dull looking but hugely engrossing RTS, which had you battling across several star systems all at the same time.

I AWAKE suddenly, dazed, uncoordinated and confused. Turning gingerly to one side, I see my colleague lying unconscious, face down in a pool of his own vomit, a trail of dried blood running down his swollen mouth. Desperately I try to recall what had passed the night before, but my memory is a haze. A bar. New people. But who were they? And what happened to this wreck of a man sprawled pathetically on the floor, sucking back his own bodily fluids like a beaten up tramp?

As always, answers to these questions would have to wait until sobriety kicked in with caffeine injected urgency, and when the weak-stomached drunkard slumped on the floor next to me (our freelance reviewer Steve Hill – who I'm forever having to share a room with on press trips) woke from his nightly alcohol-induced coma and helped fill in the missing gaps. All I know is that I'm in America and I'm clutching a card that tells me I've got an appointment with Jorg Neumann, lead designer of space-combat sim epic *Freelancer*, a game set to revolutionise the genre by melding an intriguing plot with an almost infinite free-form universe. A story which begins much like my own – one man, alone, confused and totally lost in a foreign land, looking for someone who has the answers to all his questions. This is what was said...

PCZ Tell us a bit about the team working on *Freelancer*, as well as a bit of background information about it?

JORG We all started at Origin, working on the *Wing Commander* and *Privateer* series. I was personally involved in *WC3* and *4*. Our lead programmer was involved in all four.

PCZ Are Chris and Erin Roberts still involved with *Freelancer*?

"We loved *Wing Commander*, but with *Freelancer*, we wanted to give the player the ability to go anywhere"

JORG Erin is still in the company, but is now working on an X-box title called *Brute Force*. Chris is no longer working on the game, as he wants to concentrate solely on making movies.

PCZ How will *Freelancer's* story and the free-form universe complement each other?

JORG The story is divided into 13 mission segments, which are basically divided into chapters. The actual story and script comprise of more than 2,000 pages of fiction. We have two and half hours of

cut-scenes throughout the game. Unlike the *Wing Commander* series, the plot is structured in such a way that you can get in and out of the story any time you want to. We all loved the *Wing Commander* games, but with *Freelancer*, we wanted to give the player the ability to go anywhere and do anything. The *Wing Commander* storylines were pretty confining, so we decided to build a universe with a complex set of star systems filled with different

political factions, and let the player check in and out of the story when they feel like it, and allowing them to align themselves with whatever faction they see fit along the way. It's very much like *Privateer* in this sense. The whole universe carries on regardless of what you do.

PCZ How will this work in multiplayer?

JORG You'll be able to play the multiplayer game in a free-form way too, with or against up to 16 other people. If you're working together you can team up and go and attack a massive cargo ship together.

The free-form universe works much the same way as in *Diablo*, in that everything will keep regenerating, so you can keep playing one multiplayer game pretty much indefinitely.

PCZ Tell us a bit about the mouse-only control system.

JORG We came to the conclusion that it's hindering the entire genre of space combat sims to just be able to play with a joystick. Many people don't even own one, or they're a bit worried about using one. So we decided to implement a mouse-driven control interface. Personally I use a combination of mouse and keyboard to play the game and I think it works really well. The basic principal is that because

JORG In the *Wing Commander* series, we kind of kept the enemies away from you to an extent, so you'd only be battling against a handful of them at a time. In *Freelancer* there's the possibility of having several formations of enemies attacking you at once in co-ordinated attacks.

PCZ In the free-form part of the game, can you choose what kind of a freelancer you want to be, be it law-abiding, criminal or whatever?

JORG There are basically 50 political factions that populate the universe. These are split up into four different houses. These houses represent different political standpoints. You start the game in Liberty – which has the political beliefs similar to



It may have been delayed by several years, but it's still looking amazing.

it's a mouse driven game, anywhere you can click on the screen, you can shoot. In the past you always had to align your ship exactly with the target, because you could only shoot straight ahead. In *Freelancer*, if you can see it, you can shoot it. During combat, you can either control your ship's movement and guns, or click on a target to automatically trail it, and then just concentrate on shooting.

Jorg then proceeds to play *Freelancer* and engages two enemy ships in battle. Twelve seconds later...

JORG I died. (*Embarrassed silence...*) Err, yes, well errr, we're trying to do

"You can even bribe the NPCs in an attempt to repair your reputation with certain groups and factions"

for space combat games what *Diablo* did for fantasy-action games, by opening it up to the masses. We've also added a third-person action mode to make it even more accessible, so all you have to do is drag your mouse across the screen to move your ship around and aim at the enemy that way.

PCZ What changes will there be in regards to the amount of enemies you'll encounter in *Freelancer*, as opposed to past space-combat sims?

America's – where you've lost your ship. You have to take on the first mission you're given, but after that you're cut loose and can pretty much go anywhere you like in the universe and become whatever you want to be, be it a pirate, mercenary, bounty hunter, whatever, and align yourself with any one of the 50 factions.

PCZ Will these factions have differing stances to each other?

JORG Yes, each of the factions will have different feelings towards one another. So if you align yourself with the police, the military will like you, the shipping companies will help you, but all the

criminals will be out to get you, and vice versa. You can also try to switch sides if you want, any time throughout the game.

PCZ Will you be able to fly down to the planets' surfaces?

JORG We thought about it. However, one of the main things we wanted to do was make the game really simple to play. So when you want to land on a planet's surface, it's done automatically for you, so that the whole experience doesn't become tedious.



Be a peace-keeper or a law-breaker. It's your choice.

PCZ Tell me a bit about the trade lanes we've been hearing so much about?

JORG These are basically space-highways for salesmen. When you're a pirate and you want to attack convoys, this is where you go. By shooting out part of the highway, you can make whatever's passing through drop out into normal space. It could be a convoy, it could be a police ship. You just have to take your chances. As a criminal you can also hide out in asteroid fields and nebulas and wait for passing ships to hijack.

PCZ Can you tell us about the other characters you'll come across?

JORG We wanted to put a lot of RPG elements into the game. We have more than 160 places where you can land and 2,000 NPCs, all with their own stories, personalities, rumours to tell and missions to offer. You can even bribe these NPCs in an attempt to repair your reputation with certain groups and factions. If you take a mission from someone and fail it, then

they'll get angry with you and the faction that person belongs to will start disliking you. Your actions matter in the grand scheme of the universe.

PCZ Can you give me an example of a typical free-form mission?

JORG Sure. You may for example hear a rumour about how 200 years ago, a ship carrying goods became stranded in a dangerous asteroid field. So you may want to have a go at looking for the ship and liberating the cargo for yourself. However, it'll be dangerous and you might just end up damaging your ship.

And with that I bade Jorg farewell, took my leave, and made a beeline straight for the nearest bar to tell a bunch of disinterested strangers and probably an already semi-re-inebriated Steve Hill about the incredible – no, stunning – game I had just seen. Believe me, it's going to be well worth the wait. **PCZ**



Unreal TOURNAMENT 2003

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PC Zone



www.unrealtournament2003.com

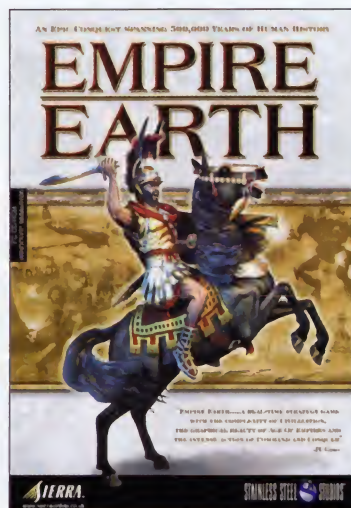


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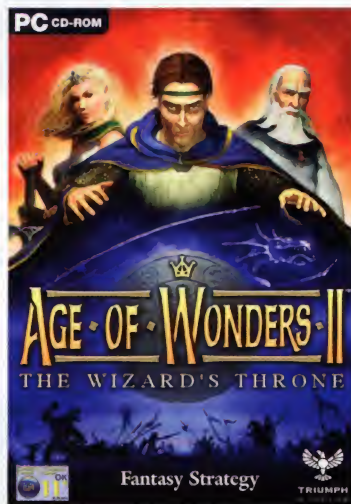
MONOPOLY TYCOON



EMPIRE EARTH



GRAND THEFT AUTO 3



AGE OF WONDERS 2

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WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON

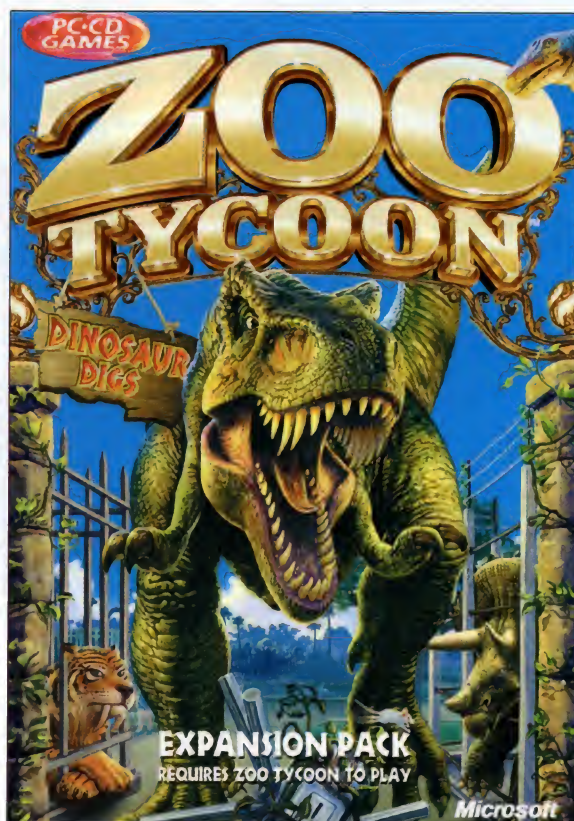
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REVIEWS

CHRISTMAS COME EARLY



■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

▲ What... on earth... is going... on? Summer is usually the time when the games market is more bereft of quality titles than an aging heavyweight boxer. You see, no games company generally wants to risk releasing big budget titles when the majority of people (*EverQuest* fanatics excluded) are all outside in the sun, desperately trying to add a hint of colour to their pallid death-like complexions. But this year, things have been very different.

Last summer was bleak, a daily struggle to track down review code. Something, anything! *Hoyle's Book of Games 64*? Yes. *Washing Machine Tycoon 12*? Bring it on. Games which would disappear from the public eye faster than a *Big Brother* contestant after eviction. So imagine my surprise (and pathetic child-like joy) when the quality titles started rolling in. *GTAIII*, *Morrowind*, *F1 2002*, *Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Soldier Of Fortune II*, *Wizardry 8* and now *Mafia*, *Warcraft III*, *GP4* and *Crazy Taxi*. In the months leading up to and during summer, the games industry has sprung into a frenzy of activity. And that's not all, because over the next couple of months it's going to get even better. *Unreal Tournament 2003* and *Medieval: Total War* are another two potential classics which are just a stone's throw away from completion. You could almost say that it's like Christmas come early.

Rarely has there been a better time to be a PC owner. Hardware prices are tumbling and game developers are raising the bar on a near monthly basis. A year ago everyone was bleating on about how the Xbox was about to kill off the PC, how no developer wanted to commit to a dying format. When will these people learn? The PC is not only here to stay, it's leading the way in the evolution of gaming.



Live the life of the mob in this gangster epic. Turn to page 64 to read our verdict.



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means that you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. We know that occasionally

you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

What are you currently playing?

Morrowind

What's your favourite gangster movie?

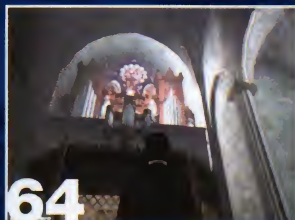
Casino. Scorsese, De Niro and Pesci, on top of their game.



STEVE O'HAGAN

Medieval: Total War Beta

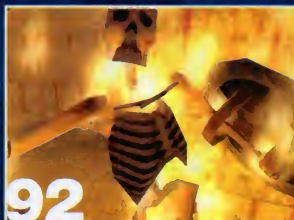
Goodfellas. How the f**k am I funny? What the f**k is so funny about me?



64

MAFIA

Come and join the family



92

RE-RELEASES

Older games get a re-release



94

UPDATES

Patches and multiplayer reviews



96

SUPERTEST

Battle of the storylines

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

64 MAFIA

STUNNING GANGSTER EPIC FROM THE CREATORS OF HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS

70 CRAZY TAXI

LEARN THE KNOWLEDGE AND GO CRAZY

74 OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RESISTANCE

FIGHT OFF THE PINKOS TO SAVE YOUR COUNTRY

76 WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

BLIZZARDS LONG AWAITED RTS EPIC HAS ARRIVED

80 GRAND PRIX 4

GRAMMOND GOES FOURTH

82 KOHAN: AHRIMAN'S GIFT

83 MOTOGP:

ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY

84 INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN 2002

85 INDUSTRY GIANT 2

86 STARMAGEDDON: PROJECT EARTH

88 AGE OF WONDERS II: THE WIZARD'S THRONE

89 CRICKET 2002

90 ZANZARAH: THE HIDDEN PORTAL

90 MYTHICAL WARRIORS

91 AGASSI TENNIS GENERATION 2002

91 DINO ISLAND

91 SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ II

92 RE-RELEASES

INCLUDING SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS, VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - REDEMPTION, TOMB RAIDER III, THIEF II: THE DARK PROJECT, TOCA 2, QUAKE II AND MANY, MANY MORE

94 UPDATES

COUNTER-STRIKE V1.5, WWII ONLINE V1.6 AND MOBILE FORCES MULTIPLAYER

96 SUPERTEST

STORYLINES IN GAMES. HALF-LIFE, MAX PAYNE, PLANESCAPE TORMENT, WARRIOR KINGS, DEUS EX AND GRIM FANDANGO SQUARE UP IN A BATTLE OF THE PLOTS



70



74



76



MARTIN KORDA

Warcraft III and Warrior Kings

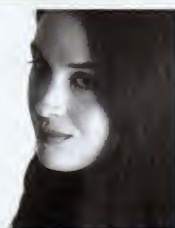
Ali G Indahouse. Either that or Goodfellas.



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Crazy Taxi

I think Goodfellas is overrated so I'll have to go for The Godfather.



RHIANNA PRATCHETT

Neverwinter Nights and Morrowind

Goodfellas. No you're not funny Mr Pesci, sir.



MARK HILL

Neverwinter Nights

Goodfellas. Because it's a bloody good movie.



PAUL PRESLEY

Counter-Strike

The Godfather. Mumble, mumble, respect, mumble.



STEVE HILL

Cricket 2002

Goodfellas. Because it's particularly violent.



MAFIA

■ £34.99 | Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Illusion Softworks | ETA: July 26 | www.mafia-game.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800 and a 32Mb 3D card

Treat him with the respect he deserves and *Mark Hill* might just let you join his new family



INPERSPECTIVE

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Reviewed Issue 116, Score 95%

More freedom and greater emphasis on wild, fast driving, make it a very different experience despite all the obvious similarities to *Mafia*.

HITMAN: CODENAME 47

Reviewed Issue 98, Score 85%

If it's assassinations you're after, this is a flawed but very playable stealth murder simulation. Like *Mafia*, it's rock hard and has no save game feature.

SO THERE you are, leaning against the cab you've been driving all day and puffing on a cheap cigarette, the kind that roughs up your throat just for the hell of it. You hear a squeal of tyres and round the corner come two smartly dressed guys carrying pieces and legging it for all they're worth. Before you know what's happening they're both in the back of your cab and you're flooring the accelerator into life. Only you haven't moved more than a couple of feet before the rival gang's car behind you catches up, rams into the side and sends you flying into the stone steps of someone's front door. You recover, back out, reach the end of the street and make a sharp turn. You think you've lost them until your two passengers start shooting out of

"*Mafia* captures the powerful pull and violent magic of dozens of classic Hollywood films"

the windows and you're knocked again into a wild spin that ends with one street lamp less for the local dogs to piss on. You're about to step on it again when you catch the face of one of the wiseguys in the rear-view mirror. He's dead. The world fades to black and you still don't know what all that was about. Then all of a sudden, there you are again leaning against the cab you've been driving all day and puffing on a cheap cigarette...

STRAIGHT TO BUSINESS

Most games like to cosset you for a while, hold you by the hand and assure you that you're the

one in control. A select few – *Resident Evil* springs to mind – prefer to throw you in at the deep end. And you know what? That's exactly what happens to you here.

Mafia let's you know right from the start that you're in for one hell of a ride, that you're going to be as tense as if it were your own arse on the line, and that one tiny mistake is going to be enough to send you right back to the beginning of the mission.

Anyone who's played *Hidden & Dangerous*, the game that put Illusion Softworks on the map with a big shout, will know that really hard missions that have

you kicking the cat with frustration as you play them for the 15th time are not necessarily a bad thing as long as they're good. And in *Mafia*, they're bloody brilliant.

But we'll get to that later. For now, let me put to rest any ideas you may have of this being a *Grand Theft Auto III* rip-off. It's true that there are obvious similarities. In both games you play a criminal, you drive cars, you're chased by the police. In both games there's a massive city to explore. And in both games you're sent on missions to kill people. But where *GTA III* was pure cartoon anarchy, *Mafia* is a very structured cinematic





There are few more satisfying moments than when you get the chance to throw a Molotov cocktail at an opponents car.

affair. This means you lose out on freedom but gain on story and characterisations.

Perhaps the most important difference between them though, is that *GTA III* is a superb driving game with some occasional shooting, while *Mafia* is a superb shooter with some occasional driving. Not that it seems like that at first. After shaking off the rival mob and delivering the gangsters to safety in the manic first mission race described in the opening paragraph, the game lets Tommy (that's you) become acquainted with the rather



The cars change through the years.

enormous city of Lost Heaven by getting you to drive customers to the hospital, the bank and so on. Unlike the taxi missions in *GTA III* though, you don't have a choice of who to

pick up. Instead you have to get to your destination and wait for the next scripted passenger. And if you bash the car too much or run someone over, it's back to the start of the ride.

"For once, you're given a proper character to play who has thoughts, doubts and feelings"

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

YOU MESS WITH ME PUNK, YOU MESS WITH MY FAMILY



Don Salieri. The boss of the family isn't up to Marlon Brando's standards, but a quiet air of menace and a reasonable demeanour make up for that. Has a large cigar permanently glued to his fat fingers.



Paulie. The Joe Pesci of the gang. He's small, very aggressive and gets on well with Tommy. Just watch them swagger together with baseball bats in their hands ready to beat someone to a mush.



Sam. A bit of a non-entity. Doesn't say much but is handy with a gun, which means you only really notice him when there's a big firefight going on. Also has a nasty habit of getting shot and needing to be rescued.



Tommy. That's you that is. You backstabbing bastard. How can you show your face around here after betraying the family? Squealing to the police for protection like some old woman. You're the lowest of the low.

HE AVOIDS COPPERS

BREAKIN' THE LAW, BREAKIN' THE LAW



Once those cuffs appear they're really out to get you.

The police are a constant presence in the city, even more so than in *GTA III*. This being a realism-obsessed game, they don't just come after you when you run someone over or nick a car, you'll get on their wanted list by going over 40 (the inner city speed limit) or failing to stop at a red light. Luckily, you can hit a button that automatically restricts your speed to the limit, although you might want to take it off if you're involved in a chase.

If you're seen speeding by a patrolman, the wanted sign will disappear after you've turned a corner or run over the nearest phone box (so he can't report your crime). If you're caught all you have to do is pay a fine. Watch out if you do anything worse though, as being arrested or shot means you'll have to start your mission again.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

It wouldn't be much of a mafia game if you were stuck driving a cab for the rest of your life and, soon enough, that rival gang (headed by Don Morelli) from the first mission manages to track down your vehicle and proceeds to smash it to a scrap heap and you to a pulp, leaving you with no means of livelihood and a fierce thirst for revenge. Luckily,

Don Salieri, the boss of the two wiseguys you helped escape can provide both. The first by welcoming you to the family, the second by sending you armed with a baseball bat and a couple of Molotov cocktails to Morelli's parking lot to smash up some cars of your own.

This would be interesting enough in itself, but what gives it a little narrative edge is that the whole game is basically a flashback of Tommy's life, as told years later to an Irish cop in exchange for protection. For once, you're given a proper character to play, one who – unlike the antihero of *GTA III*, for example – has thoughts of his own, doubts and feelings. Heck, he even has a family and changes physically through the years that *Mafia* encompasses. It's not a leap forward in the sort of game storytelling discussed in this month's Supertest (see page



Stop that you pervert.



Some buildings under construction early on are finished in later years.

96), because it's very much a mission-led game, where the story is told mostly in cut-scenes. But the vibe of all those gangster films we know and love is captured extremely well. There's even a level where you walk the barman's daughter home, finger pressed on the SHIFT key to avoid running ahead of her while you talk. This right before you save her from a rape attack and are rewarded with the chance to test how much the springs on her bed squeak. Unfortunately, this scene is not playable, but the ensuing cut-scene helps to give it that 'you're watching a movie' feel.

GET REAL

But it's the bits you play that matter. And here is where the main difference with *GTA III* arises: *Mafia* is all about realism. The period cars are recreated in

"The game lets you know right from the start that you're in for one hell of a ride"

full detail, from their acceleration, top speed, weight and suspension. What this means is that most of the vehicles move like milk floats when compared to the road rockets in *GTA*. But that's part of the game's charm. After a while you forget about the car's limitations and get sucked into the era. All the detail and realistic touches let you become totally involved and forget now and again that you're playing a game using mouse and keyboard on a beige monitor. It's true that driving isn't a bag of arcade fun (mainly because the ever watchful cops force you to keep to the speed limits), but that's not the point. You won't be nicking cars and cruising around just for the hell of it, but there's plenty of driving in the missions,

and you do always have to get to places yourself, so the immersion factor is very important.

But the crux of the game lies in the shooter sections, and these too are far removed from mindless arcade mayhem. Whether you've been sent on an assassination attempt or are involved in a vendetta strike, the action is always tough and unpredictable. Although the engine has a similar feel to *Hidden & Dangerous*, it also works very much like a third-person *Counter-Strike*. It's all about ducking behind cars, creeping round corners and being extremely careful about everything you do. And when I said it was unpredictable it's because, while the enemies are roughly in the same place every time you play a level, they never seem to do the same thing twice (bar certain scripted moments). As if it wasn't hard enough

already. The AI – except for occasional glitches – works well as a team too. So once you've been spotted they'll try to surround you and then roll away and take cover when you start shooting.

I can't emphasise enough just how much the tension builds up when you're expecting

someone to put a cap in the back of your head when you least expect it. But at least they have the same disadvantage as you: limited bullets.

PLAY IT AGAIN, TOM

I've never been so aware of AI enemies having to reload and only having a limited amount of ammo. This is very important tactically. The best time to roll back into view is when you hear them reloading, and you can either wait for them to use up all their ammo and run at you with a knife or take them out quick so you can pick up as much ammo as possible. If you know what weapon they've got, you can even count the shots.

One type of reloading you can't count on though is one involving save games, since the game only saves between missions. On the one hand this is great, because it gets rid of the gameplay destroyer – constant quicksaving every two steps. But *Illusion* could have been a wee bit more generous. There are some extremely long missions – so long you have to load a few new sections – that have no autosaves in between. So, after a dozen attempts you make it right to the end and then something else unexpected happens and you have to start over. It's equally frustrating and rewarding, with every ten bursts of anger balanced out with a real sense of achievement you wouldn't get otherwise.



It doesn't matter where you shoot, they all die the same way.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

GET YOUR GUNS OUT

I don't think every time a game ships without multiplayer it should be counted as a missed opportunity, but *Mafia's* shooter levels are so intense they'd work a treat as a third-person *Counter-Strike* with Tommy guns instead of AK-47s. Expect to see this mode in a patch or add-on pack in the near future. If you're hoping for a save game patch though, fuggedaboutit.

We would also have liked a bit more freedom, more interactive environments and more of Tommy's personal life, which is glossed over for the most part.



The weapons are very realistic, with the Tommy gun spraying bullets all over the place.

"One minute you're shooting your way out of a set up, the next you're making a hit"

TOP OF THE WORLD, MA!

HOW THE MOVIES INFLUENCED THE MAFIA



There's more than Puzo and Coppola to this game.

Like so many games, *Mafia* doesn't try to accurately recreate historical reality: the early mobster years in America that saw prohibition elevate Al Capone to legendary status and Tommy-gun bloodbaths like the St Valentine's day massacre made the papers every week. Instead, it captures the powerful pull and violent magic of dozens of classic Hollywood films that have given the era a more lasting place in mythology than it will ever have in history books.

Not surprisingly, the Illusion team has been force-fed these movies till their eyes bled – and maybe this accounts for the game being so long in production. Most gamers will be more than familiar with the modern biggies such as *The*

Godfather I & II (from which Illusion admits lifting whole scenes), *Once Upon A Time In America* (Sergio Leone's epic spaghetti-gangster), *The Untouchables* (which was actually adapted into a game 13 years ago) and *Bonnie & Clyde*. But it's clear they haven't neglected the real source from which all the above grew. Films like *The Roaring Twenties*, *Little Caesar*, the original *Scarface*, *Angels With Dirty Faces*, *Public Enemy* and just about anything else starring James Cagney. If you fancy yourself as a true mobster-aficionado stop waving your *Godfather* DVD box set about or bragging that you know the *Goodfellas* script by heart, and dig up some of those gems. It's what *Mafia* is all about.

At least you can complete each mission in many different ways, and they're varied enough that you don't get bored at any stage. One minute you're shooting your way out of a carpark where you've been set up, the next you're making a hit on a traitor, stealing a race-car, entering a race with a different race-car, robbing a bank or stealing documents from a mansion with the help of an expert safecracker. It's intense stuff all the way. Some of the scraps you get into will remind you of the fantastic shoot out at the end of *LA Confidential*, and you really will feel the tension getting to you after a while.

HEAVEN AND HELL

Despite its greatness, and like all games, *Mafia* isn't perfect. There are a few gameplay niggles and inconsistencies. The city of Lost Heaven could have done with a bit more atmosphere (street urchins running in the



Tommy looks like a cross between Mel Gibson and Alec Baldwin.

SECOND OPINION

DAVE WOODS WAKES UP AND SMELLS THE FISHES



To be honest I've been a bit worried about *Mafia*. Endless delays coupled with a no-show at E3 had left me thinking that Illusion must have had something to hide. First impressions didn't help when I found myself comparing the slow pace of the game to the frenetic beauty of *Grand Theft Auto III*. Then I started playing it and within about, oh, five

seconds, I was completely hooked. The atmosphere is fantastic, with excellent dialogue and authentic period music and the missions are varied and bloody difficult (although not as hard as the original *Hidden & Dangerous*). I didn't get an elongated stab at the game (two missions in total before Mark kicked me off) but it was enough to leave me in complete agreement with Hill. We might have had more than our fair share of classics over the past couple of months but this is a bona fide example of a game that you just have to own.



Don't do it man, it's not worth it.

streets, fruit and vegetable stalls and so on). There could also have been a few more people working for the family, because you never really get the feeling you belong to a big, powerful organisation.

For all its cinematic power the script isn't all that hot either. Illusion has said its aim was to use high-quality acting so you

could really believe you were in a film. Well maybe their version has top of the range Czech actors, but the English ones are very average. Not necessarily bad for a computer game – except in a couple of cases – but certainly nowhere near the excellent range of voices provided by *GTA III*'s impressive Hollywood cast.

Some of you will no doubt also be put off by the increasing levels of frustration such a hard game with no saves entails. But then you wouldn't be able to call yourselves real gamers. It's the knowledge that every little

...mistake is going to cost you, that you can't afford to panic (which is precisely what you'll do), that you have to take every chance you get, that makes this the powerful and gripping experience that it is. Health is hard to come by and so is ammo, which means that although the action isn't as fluid as in something like *Max Payne*, every little success makes you feel like you're on top of the world. And that's a very rare achievement.

BADABING!

Special mention should be made about the music, which is fabulous at all times. From the original score to some great Django Reinhardt numbers and other jazzy period pieces (if you're a Woody Allen fan you'll recognise many of them from his films). You can see for yourself that the graphics are also top-notch, especially the interior levels. The engine is superb, even if it can feel a little awkward when you're shooting from a tight and confined space when the camera backs into first person.

We could list all the great references (or steals if you prefer) from some of the greatest films of all time – in particular the first two *Godfathers* – but it'll be more fun to find it all out for yourself. Let's just say that some of the things Tommy does, have more than a touch of Michael Corleone about them, and one of the members of the family is a lawyer-type very much in the vein of Tom Hagen (the Robert Duvall character in *The Godfather*).

Despite the flaws and the gameplay niggles, *Mafia*, like



The mafia business is perfect for a mission-based structure.

Hidden & Dangerous before it, has a special quality about it that means when you're involved in one of the missions, you don't care about anything else. You're completely absorbed in this world of honour, backstabbing, assassination and robbery. You're a man with a job to do, respect to win and a family to provide for.

One day we'll be able to have a game with the freedom, depth

“Despite the flaws, *Mafia* has a special quality that means when you're involved in one of the missions, you don't care about anything else”

and raw fun of *GTA III* and the story, characterisation and class of *Mafia*. For now though, they're both essential. [A-]

HOT WHEELS

BABY YOU CAN STEAL MY CAR



That's a nice little motah.

They might not fly, but these 1930s and '40s numbers are classy little vehicles, and they've been recreated to perfection. If you want to look at the stats of any given car you can view them through the handy Carcyclopaedia.

Remember that you can't just go stealing any car that takes your fancy though. As you progress through the game you get told how to break into and hotwire different models. There are also sub-missions in which you're told where certain cool, rare cars are parked and how to get to them. Any you do nab can be kept in the garage at the back of Salieri's bar.



You can ride trams and trains, just like in *GTA III*. Failing that, just steal a car.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Very tense action
- ✓ Lots of variety
- ✓ Great story
- ✓ Excellent AI
- ✗ Driving can be a chore
- ✗ Acting not great

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Tough, intense and utterly compelling.



Timeless gameplay, flawless conversion, same pop-up problems.



The game occasionally feels like it's on rails.

CRAZY TAXI

■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Hitmaker/Strangelite | ETA: July | www.empireinteractive.com/crazytaxi/index.html

REQUIRES PII 450, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** For better performance and draw distance, a PIII 733 with 128Mb RAM will do the trick

Get out of my Dreamcast, get into my 3D card... Anthony Holden gets his meter running



CRAZY TAXI'S life should have been an easy one.

Developed by the masters of arcade gaming in the heart of Sega HQ, polished to a high sheen and bursting with charisma, it had the best of everything. Where most games come into the world stunted and unsightly, with some bits missing and other bits dropping off every five minutes, here was a very pretty and good game with the rare courage to

be different. In time, it will be seen as a classic, a one of a kind, a bona fide masterpiece. But in the meantime, meaning right now, when it's just a bit too old to be new, but not quite old enough to be retro, it's considered horribly outdated and unplayable. A freak, a relic. At least by some.

This is the sad reality of the life of a

videogame. That however great a game *Crazy Taxi* was when it first appeared three years ago, and great it most certainly was, it's likely to be rejected now that it's finally made it to PC just

because it's been round the block a few times. (And because there are a couple of near-identical sequels kicking around somewhere.) And I'd just like to say that this is sick and wrong, and not



INPERSPECTIVE

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Reviewed Issue 117, Score 95%

This blissful free-roaming crime sim has its fair share of crazy driving and arcade fun, but the mission structure and gameplay variety make for a much deeper and more involving experience.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Reviewed Issue 96, Score 84%

Sharing a similar sense of mayhem with *Crazy Taxi*, the racing dynamic sees you scrapping furiously for race positions rather than high-scores and perfect cross-town dashes. It also features some superb multiplayer options.



Double the fare after 11 o'clock or if you're a ginger.



That won't be necessary mate, just pay the fare.



As in *Grand Theft Auto III*, you can pick up chicks in your car. The similarity ends there though.

much different from tying a kitten in a sack full of rocks and throwing it in a creek. Or something equally nasty.

HELP THE AGED

Now that I've got that off my chest, a bit in the way of explanation. If you hadn't already guessed, I'm of the

stumbled upon a hugely satisfying game dynamic when it came up with the idea of no-holds-barred cab driving, and somehow managed to present it in such a way that the arcade simplicity of the concept was preserved, yet with enough gameplay nuances in tow to assure longevity.

console-to-PC ports we've ever seen. While it may be taking the piss somewhat that the game has taken this long to get to PC, it remains just as playable now as it ever was. Call me a sucker, but for this reason I'm willing to overlook, for the most part, how old the game is and what other platforms it's appeared on, and concentrate on the virtues of what is, to my mind, a classic piece of arcade gameplay.

IN A NUTSHELL...

But before we launch into a discussion of the game's various merits, it's probably worth describing what the hell *Crazy Taxi* is all about, just in case one or two of you are yet to sample the delights of extreme taxicab

What's more, the PC version you're looking at now is a first-rate, rigorously faithful conversion of the Dreamcast original, probably one of the best

"The PC version is a first-rate, rigorously faithful conversion of the Dreamcast original"

belief that *Crazy Taxi*, in both its arcade and Dreamcast incarnations, was an excellent game. Hitmaker (one of Sega's leading development teams)

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Crazy Taxi 3, though remarkably similar to the first game, adds one or two special effects.

USED CAR SALESMEN

It's a glaringly obvious point, and one already stated, but the fact remains that *Crazy Taxi* is a three-year-old game that many of us have already enjoyed in various arcade and console incarnations. And although this is, by and large, a high fidelity conversion (something we should be grateful for given the slapdash jobs we usually get), it's a bit sad that no one thought it worthwhile to add any extra material to the game. A few extra city blocks, a few new destinations and customers, even some new shortcuts would have been nice. Indeed, having recently played a demo of *Crazy Taxi 3* on Xbox, we've realised how much the mere addition of turbo flames on your back wheels can enhance your driving satisfaction.

Even better, what if the developers had spent a few months putting together a level editor for the game so that the PC community could get to work making their own cities and towns? Before long we could have been ferrying passengers to and fro in every major city in the free world! Or maybe that's a bit too much to ask...

OUT OF THE BOX



Using your car as a bowling ball is not as silly as it sounds.

One of the unsung joys of *Crazy Taxi* is the so-called Crazy Box mode. Similar in many ways to the between-match challenges of that other Sega classic *Virtua Tennis*, Crazy Box is composed of a dozen small challenges designed to help you master the art of crazy driving. But what starts out as a basic training mode, introducing you to the various special moves and tricks in the game, soon transitions into a series of neat mini-games that are surprisingly compelling in their own right. Crazy balloon-popping, crazy ten-pin smash, crazy sideways jumping challenges – there's a day or two of sheer joy and frustration to be had right here, before you've even got your car on the open road.

action. Luckily, and like all the best arcade games, it's very straightforward.

The aim of the game is to rack up as much money as possible by ferrying passengers from place to place around one of the game's two cities before the clock runs down. That's it. There's no road rules, no cops, no floating power-ups or hidden coins to collect. Just you and your cab and a city full of waiting passengers.

Or at least that's the taxi part of it. The crazy part is another story altogether. Aside from the insane physics that see you bouncing around the roads and flying through the air like a *Virtua Tennis* ball, these are no ordinary passengers. For some reason, every one of them is in a tremendous hurry to get somewhere. They're also either extremely lazy or crippled,

as their destinations are often less than 50 yards down the road (but may be up to a kilometre away). What's more, they clearly have far too much spending-cash on their hands, as they tend to shower you with it every time you do something right. Narrowly

"Playing the game without using the special moves is a bit like playing *Street Fighter II* without knowing how to throw a fireball"

avoid another car (or bus, train, truck, tram, etc) and the coins come flying (this being known as the 'crazy through'). Jump off a ramp or hill (the 'crazy jump') and it's another payday.

Better yet, there are a couple of swift key combinations that allow you to pull off turbo boosts and power-slides (the 'crazy dash' and 'crazy drift', respectively), which not only make progress through the streets that much quicker, but may induce your mentally

imbalanced and bone idle customer to reward you even more generously.

CABBIES ON CRACK

While it is possible to pick up and play *Crazy Taxi* without knowing any of this, playing the game

without using the special moves is a bit like playing *Street Fighter II* without knowing how to throw a fireball (and don't even think about playing without a half-decent gamepad). It's all about rapidly executed crazy dashes and perfectly timed slides, shaving those all-important

seconds off your transit time and spiralling your tips into triple figures. And this is where the game's enormous replayability comes from. Aside from the drive to beat your high-score (or better yet, that of your mate, who, ideally, is sitting next to you and taking turns as

you play) it's simply the need to become a better, crazier driver. There's always room for improvement, whether it's in your knowledge of the cities and their many short cuts, or your skill at stopping right at the feet of every passenger, thwarting any possible delay as they scurry over to your cab. Plus, the more crazy drifts, crazy throughs and crazy jumps you can combo together without crashing into anything, the higher your tips become. And once you've got a handle on all of this, you can enjoy that other great arcade pleasure – showing off.

While this addictive, mesmerising need to perfect your skills clearly succeeded in making *Crazy Taxi* a rather good arcade game, the whole thing works much better in the comfort of your own home. The learning curve of the game easily outlasts the occasional interactions of arcade play, where only those



Combining specials together is the only way to get the big tips.





disparagement are given their due consideration. But there's no reason you can't all huddle around your household PC and pretend you own the arcade – a few cigarette burns in your keyboard casing and you'll never know the difference.

THE KNOWLEDGE

A great deal of longevity also arises simply from the size and complexity of the game's two cities. The first of these, as featured in the original arcade game, is the more straightforward of the two, comprising a long loop with some San Fran style hills, a simple low-rise shopping district and a more problematic downtown area. It's all pretty straightforward, with a few easily located shortcuts and plenty of obvious landmarks.

The second, or 'original' city (introduced in the Dreamcast version) is a very different proposition. Near identical streets are joined at fiendish and confusing angles, roads cross over and under each other, circuitous byways and large city blocks ensure that a single wrong turn can result in a long and costly detour... There's even a bloody big bay area to negotiate on one side of town. The upshot is that you can no longer rely on the guide arrow and your indifferent knowledge of the

willing to sacrifice bucket-loads of loose change were able to master the game's true subtleties.

That said, the game is still much better enjoyed as a social experience, where one-upmanship, mockery and



Only a fool would suggest this game belongs only in an arcade.



The game was a pioneer of shameless product placement.

DAVE WOODS HAD A DREAM(CAST)

SECOND OPINION



I had *Crazy Taxi* on Dreamcast and it was an absolute blast. It was like having an arcade machine in your front room. It looked exactly like the coin-op original with its super-fast frame-rate, massively detailed city and gleaming cabs, and it's one of those games that takes absolutely no getting into. Five seconds into your first go and you're loving it. When I got it, I played it for a day solid. And then got bored.

Some games are just meant for the arcades, and *Crazy Taxi* is one of them. In short, ten minute bursts, you can't fail but be entertained, but other than beating your previous high-score, there's precious little in the way of long-term interest. I want more meat to my games when I'm at home. Even on a console, I'd take *Gran Turismo* over *Crazy Taxi* every time. And this is even more true for PC gaming. Who buys a PC to try and emulate a three year-old console? This is Sega doing its best to recoup what it lost on the Dreamcast debacle. On budget it would be good for a bit of fun, but at £30, it's just not worth it.

streets to get by. Clever use of shortcuts such as train tracks, underground tunnels and highway overpasses is essential. You even have to jump over entire city blocks now and again to be truly efficient.

At first, much of this is frustrating, especially when you realise that the big green arrow guiding you to your destination is giving you a major bum-steer, but it highlights the fact that this is no longer just a ten minute arcade investment. And once your initial anger subsides, getting your passengers there in record time becomes much more satisfying.

CRAZY/BEAUTIFUL

The other reason *Crazy Taxi* is such a pleasure to play is the sheer exuberance of the whole thing. The graphics, while fairly unsophisticated, are bursting with colour and vitality. Silly voices add a measure of humour, and ridiculous jumps and bumps ensure that you never start to take things too seriously. In short, it looks and sounds like (and is) a fun game.

For some people these very elements will be a turn-off, suggesting, as they do, a shallow experience and one unsuited to the PC platform (see Dave's Second Opinion boxout for starters). In some ways this is fair enough – whatever floats your boat and all that. And there's no denying that this is indeed light entertainment, making few

demands on your grey matter. But anyone willing to embrace *Crazy Taxi*'s upbeat arcade aesthetic will find an incredibly gratifying game beneath, one founded on pure, distilled

gameplay values and good old-fashioned insanity.

It is three-years-old, and a console game at heart, but *Crazy Taxi* is also a brilliant game. And that's what matters, right? **PCZ**

"The graphics, while fairly unsophisticated, are bursting with colour and vitality"

ANOTHER DAY



All the cheat modes from the console version are intact.

One of the additions made to the Dreamcast version, and therefore also found in the PC game, is a hidden mode called Another Day. By hitting a simple combination of buttons at the character selection screen, you can reset all the passengers and their destinations, which are otherwise always exactly the same. If you're playing the game heavily, especially in the smaller city, this mode provides some much-needed variety to proceedings, which can otherwise become a bit predictable. Unfortunately it is just a second set of passenger destinations and not a randomising feature, which seems like a bafflingly easy thing for the developers to have implemented...

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Timeless arcade gameplay
- ✓ Simple and fun yet offering surprising longevity
- ✓ Excellent conversion to PC
- ✗ No new content
- ✗ Three years old

81

A little older, but no less crazy



You get to use some serious hardware even though you're fighting a guerilla war.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RESISTANCE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Bohemia Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.flashpoint1985.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 128Mb 3D card

After retiring from active service, **Richie Shoemaker** opens his door to a stern-faced **Colonel Korda**, who barks out some orders: "We've got an expansion pack situation and we need you back for one last mission"

**REQUIRES ORIGINAL
OPERATION
FLASHPOINT:
COLD WAR CRISIS**



LITHUANIA, Estonia and Latvia are countries that up until the end of the Cold War few would have even heard about, let alone visited. Indeed to a great many people they might still remain today as fantastical as Middle Earth or Button Moon if it wasn't for their combined musical might. As some of you

may know, it was Estonia who won last year's Eurovision Song Contest and Latvia who dominated this year's event. (Not that I saw either contest, you understand.) These Baltic brothers may be small in number, globally insignificant and geographically pitiable, but they certainly know how to rock the funky beat.

However, the citizens of fictional *Operation Flashpoint* islands Everon, Malden and Kolgujev – in stark contrast to their Baltic neighbours – know nothing of euro pop, freedom, or indeed, Button Moon. Stuck in a mid-'80s time warp – though they have been spared the mullet epidemic – the collective population of *Operation Flashpoint*'s three fictional islands have instead had to play host to successive waves of NATO and Soviet forces, each slugging it out for control of their lands.

RUN TO THE HILLS

According to official figures, in excess of a million people have fought across *Flashpoint*'s war-torn world, first in the original campaign for NATO, then as the Soviet Union, thanks, of course, to last year's *Red Hammer* mission pack. However, we've had quite enough of *Flashpoint*'s previous three islands, and it is with thanks and some relief that *Flashpoint*'s second expansion pack *Resistance*, introduces a fourth, Nogovo. Rather than have you fighting as the technically affluent West or under the red banner of socialist Russia, this time you are on the side of the little people; the ones who in time of war pick up their pitchforks and head into the mountains.

Set some years prior to

Operation Flashpoint, Resistance has you playing as Fatboy Slim look-alike and Pierce Brosnan sound-alike, Victor Troska, an ex-Soviet soldier, who, having had enough of fighting for the motherland, has moved to the relatively idyllic republic. It is there, one day on his way to his office,

that he learns on the radio that his adopted homeland isn't quite as tranquil as he first envisaged. It seems the pro-democratic government is in tatters and seizing the chance to reclaim the land in the name of socialism, the Reds are poised to take over in a way only they know how; by sending in a massive invasion force.



The inevitable transpires and, of course, a few locals put up a fight, but like trying to find a decent pub in Welwyn Garden City, it is a gesture as desperate as it is futile. Nonetheless, it isn't long until our reluctant hero is in the thick of the action fighting against impossible odds.

INPERSPECTIVE

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: GOLD EDITION

Reviewed Issue 116, Score 90%

An essential purchase for any action/strategy fan, it sees you battling against the soviet forces in eastern Europe.

GHOST RECON: COLLECTORS' PACK

Reviewed Issue 118, Score 88%

You can't fly choppers, drive tanks or even ride in the back of a Trabant, but for realistic small arms combat on a much smaller scale, *Ghost Recon* probably just edges it.



You'll need a high-end PC to appreciate the game at its best.



You'll get the opportunity to pilot a wide variety of vehicles.



Keep your men alive and they gain valuable experience.

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

Far more convincing than either the original game or the first add-on, thanks to improved cut-scenes and a competent script, *Resistance* provides a much more intense experience, where your actions have greater consequence not only on the mission at hand, but in future operations. As your soldiers progress through the campaign they steadily gain experience.

Lose one and you lose not just one man, but a potentially experienced soldier.

As well as experience, there are more tangible resources to worry about too. Up against a large, well-equipped and organised force, Nogovo's resistance needs to steal every weapon and bullet they can from captured supply trucks and twitching corpses. It may all sound a bit low-tech compared

to previous *Flashpoint* adventures when you're spending all your time going through the pockets of dead Russian conscripts, but there are few better *Flashpoint* moments than when there's a tank coming towards you and

halfway between you both is a dead body slumped over an anti-tank rocket.

COLD WAR STASIS

While it would be difficult to recommend *Resistance* for its new weapons and drivable

Although the campaign itself is a little on the difficult side, the fact that *Flashpoint* players have a new island to explore should prove a big draw. Despite the hangovers of a cumbersome interface and some annoying bugs, it's a quality addition to

"Your actions have consequences on the mission at hand and in future operations"

INTERFACELIFT

FINDING A FIGHT HAS NEVER BEEN SO EASY



The island comes with nine multiplayer maps.

Although it was usually worth the effort, *Operation Flashpoint*'s multiplayer game was never an easy or accessible game to get into, thanks to a poor interface, clueless players and frequent crashes. Made more stable since the original release, Bohemia Interactive has



You can always take it out on your own side.

finally got round to giving the multiplayer game a makeover, with games now easier to find and set up than before. Unfortunately there are still some smash-and-grab players out there, which means co-operative games are still your best bet.

vehicles (though the motorbike is a lot of fun), those wishing to upgrade a game they still find enjoyable should see this as an essential purchase. Graphically, the terrain is far more detailed – not just on the new island, but the old three have also been touched up; all the trees look like proper trees and for those with top of the range PCs, the game now boasts an incredible depth of view.

Certainly some of the animations could have done with an upgrade – soldiers still run as if they've lost bowel control – and there are clipping problems indoors and bizarre instances of soldiers running around in odd directions. Most annoying of all is that the archaic RTS-style interface used to give orders remains intact, whereas a context-sensitive order system would have worked far better. Alas...

what was and remains the best tactical action game around. Those who may have given up on *Flashpoint* halfway through are the only ones who need think twice before purchasing. **EX**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Enjoyable new campaign
- ✓ Soldiers now gain experience
- ✓ Graphically improved
- ✓ New multiplayer interface
- ✗ Clumsy command interface remains
- ✗ Inconsistencies with the AI and clipping

83

A flawed but irresistible add-on



Now you remember what to do with the hammer right Harold? OK, bring out the boyscouts.



Hey Goldilocks. Get a haircut, get a job and stop pestering orcs.

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

■ £39.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Blizzard | ETA: Out Now | www.blizzard.com

REQUIRES PIII 400, 128Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 600, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

The Orcs are rebelling, the human alliance crumbling and only one man can save the world in Blizzard's long-awaited RTS epic. But as he wasn't available, we sent in Martin Korda instead



INPERSPECTIVE

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 89 Score 93%

Still the best RTS money can buy, *Shogun* does away with storyline and replaces it with epic battles involving thousands of troops and setting them over beautiful 3D landscapes. War on the PC doesn't get much more realistic than this.

WARRIOR KINGS

Reviewed Issue 114 Score 90%

If you're more into building up economies and strong storylines, this is your best bet. Currently the most visually impressive RTS on the PC, it features great units, massive tactical diversity and an excellent branching storyline. Sadly some annoying bugs still sully an otherwise superb and ground-breaking game.

MY STORY begins many years ago (mist floats eerily past the page), in a land across the great sea, where a bloody conflict raged between the two mighty tribes of Blizzard and Westwood. Driven by their lust for supremacy but blinded by a bitter, short-sighted rivalry, the great tribes slowly became complacent. Their predictability bred weakness and lethargy, until the conflict faded away like a dying star, and the drums of war fell silent once again.

An uneasy peace settled across the land. The tribes' loyal subjects drifted from the battlefield, lost souls looking for a new purpose – a new leader who could lead them once more to glory and honour. But during this age of emasculation, new powers were moving across the land, threatening to extinguish the tribes' hopes for a return to a golden age. The resounding crash of the drums of war danced across the land once more, like a thundercrack which heralds the storm. From the darkness emerged two new heroes, the *Shogun* and the

Warrior King, who swept aside their rivals like the tides of the sea with their revolutionary tactics and devastating new technologies.

Now, years later, these two, once great tribes, stand on the brink of extinction as they prepare to make one final stand upon the field of warriors. Led by two great heroes, the all Commanding and Conquering General of Westwood and the one they call *Warcraft III* of Blizzard. It is his story that I shall tell you now, as he stands proud at the helm of his men, a chilling battlecry engulfing the world, and his once dominant tribe clinging on to the strands of supremacy, as fragile as a flame in the wind. The day of their judgement has come.

A LONG TIME COMING

Well it's finally here, and quite honestly, it's about time. After four loong yeaars of holding our breath, turning blue, killing a gazillion brain cells and then repeating the process a thousand more times, the wait is finally over. However, before we

IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC



Many of the spells are visually spectacular.

CALLING ALL HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

One of *Warcraft III*'s strongest features is undoubtedly the magic. There are numerous types of spells that your hero can cast, from the healing sort to the guts-spillingly offensive types. There are also summoning spells which call forth a bunch of pug-faced nasties, which battle by your side for a limited period or until they're cut into bloody strands of raw meat by your enemies. What's more, you can resurrect your fallen heroes (at a cost) if they fall foul of the enemy (especially good in the excellent multiplayer games which we'll be reviewing separately next month). Which of course means you won't have to leave your hero back at base for fear of losing them, or run the risk of them immersing themselves into degrading menial household tasks in order to alleviate their boredom, slowly degenerating into a dress-wearing, rosy-faced and unnaturally cheerful home-maker with an unhealthy interest in flower pressing. Now there's a relief.



Water Elementals are one of numerous mythical creatures you'll encounter.



The annual dragon hoola-hoop championship dragged on well into winter.

delve into the depths of the game, cogitate on its nuances and developments and generally spew out gasps of exaggerated admiration or spat-out hatred, let's just skim over the background story. You know, just in case you haven't played either of the past two *Warcraft* titles. Or in case you were still one ejaculation away from existence back then. Ready? Right here we go.

Set 15 years after *Warcraft II* – in which a titanic battle raged between human and orc clans, led by heroes with names sounding like a nasal passage being cleared (Khadgar, Ner'zhul, Azeroth, etc) – war is once again brewing after a period of peace. The suppressed Orcs, under their new Warchief Thrall, are threatening to take back their conquered lands, and a new, more sinister evil is brewing, connected (or so a wizened old mage who cross-dresses like a bird believes) to an ancient prophecy, regarding the return of demons to the world. OooOooh, spooky stuff

indeed. Anyhow, after the stunning (and I mean rip-your-eyes-out-in-pure-disbelief stunning) intro, you're thrown into the first of five campaigns. Or four and a quarter if you want to be pedantic about it.

FOUR IN ONE

The first thing that strikes you is that you don't just get to play one story from two perspectives. Nonononono! Instead, you get to play one ever-evolving story over the course of these campaigns. And it works superbly. But more on that later.

Starting off as the Orcs in a prologue campaign, you then move onto the Human, Undead, Orc (again) and finally Knight Elf missions, which when added using an advanced form of algebra ($2+9+9+8+9$), approaches almost 40 levels in total.

Longevity then, is not a problem. However, before you skip round the room in over-optimistic exuberance, let me just ask you to reserve your

judgement until we're finished.

So then, onto the critical part. Gameplay.

DEJA VU

Hmm, OK this is a tough one to call. But call it I must. Admittedly, the *Warcraft* series has always prided itself on its ease of accessibility, speed of gameplay and manic battles. In fact, Blizzard has carved itself a niche, no, a cavern, when it comes to this style of game. And *Warcraft III* is no different. For all its glorious 3D splendour and array of superbly rendered and animated units, it still holds dear the very essence of its predecessors, and subsequently very little has changed in the core gameplay department. You still have to build a base, collect resources, build up an army while fending off groups of enemy marauders who, to their credit, intelligently pick out and attack the weak points of your base in an attempt to annihilate your loyal subjects and skewer their heads on stakes outside your fallen city walls.

But let's just pause for a second and think about this... *Warcraft II* is pushing on towards its seventh birthday, which in human years would make it more

"You play one ever-evolving story over the course of four campaigns – and it's superb"



A TALE OF FOUR SIDES



The orcs and humans contemplate a new evil.

ONE STORY, BUT FOUR VERY DIFFERENT SIDES

Of the four sides on offer, the humans are probably the most well-rounded, while the Undead excel defensively. They also have the ability to raise the dead, meaning once the enemy has lost a number of units, the Undead shamans can resurrect them and turn them against their one-time comrades. Nasty.

Orcs are easily the most powerful offensively, although their defensive capabilities are about as daunting as an under-fives football team's rearguard. The Knight Elves not only have the advantage magically, but can also conceal themselves well at night. As for the choice of units, overall the selection is pretty well thought out (many units have unique, upgradeable abilities), and range from standard foot soldiers to mighty fire-spewing dragons. Ultimately though, during the base-building/conquering missions, it's pretty unimportant which side you're playing as, as victory tactics are almost always identical.

wrinkly than a severely dehydrated prune. No matter how much of a *Warcraft* fan you are (I still kiss my *Warcraft II* pillowcase every night and my *Warcraft II* Y-fronts are still my favourite pair of pants, so I reckon I could be considered an

entrenched in the past. It's a feeling that follows you round unshakably, wheedling its way into your psyche until you realise that you've seen it all before. In fact, anyone who knows their RTS from their YTS will recognise that *Warcraft III* is ultimately,

"I still kiss my *Warcraft II* pillowcase every night and my *Warcraft II* Y-fronts are still my favourite pair of pants"

enthusiast), it's hard to get away from the feeling that this third instalment is very much

horror of horrors, a build-and-rush-strategy game. There I've said it. But it is. However, before you cut out my

photo and throw kitchen knives at my groin in disgust, allow me to explain myself.

CASTRATION PREVENTION

First off, if you're a *Warcraft* fan, relax. Breathe in... breathe out. There, that's better. It's not nearly as bad as you may think, and if you've taken a sneaky glance at the score, you'll already have realised this. But there are some glaring issues which need to be mentioned.

In the seven years since its predecessor took the world by storm, both the RTS genre and PC games as a whole have moved on massively. Not only graphically but in terms of gameplay, strategy and tactics. However, at least 60 per cent of the missions in *Warcraft III* involve building up a few bases, amassing as many troops as possible and then mindlessly wading into the nearest enemy encampment, clouting anything which moves round the head until it drops off, and generally hoping your forces can overwhelm your adversary. After this it's back to base, build more troops, attack a different enemy base, return to your base, aaaaaand relax.

However, despite an excellently implemented line-of-sight feature (which allows you to use the terrain to avoid the enemy instead of mindlessly



Hahahahahahaha! They're in real trouble then, aren't they?

visuals look tired fairly early on. As if that wasn't enough, there are no formation options, flanking bonuses or terrain advantages, such as using the

way forward and in contrast, *Warcraft III*'s simplistic approach just feels, well, old.

ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE

But enough pessimism. There's much to be enjoyed and plenty to eulogise about. Many of the non base-building missions add a refreshing change to the drudge of constructing and killing – such as escorting convoys and holding out for a set time against hordes of rabid enemies.

The much vaunted 'Hero' element is also superb. Throughout the four main campaigns you'll get to control a selection of these champions, from a Scottish-accented dwarf who looks like Father Christmas to a powerful wizard(ess), whose breasts alone are enough to take out an entire legion of enemies. Just wait till you see what she can do with her magic wand.

Each of these heroes has their own diverse and well-thought-out set of spells and abilities. Strong RPG elements mean that as they gain levels, the heroes become both more powerful and adept at their spells – which can



Tiddles, aged nine months.

gradient to get the upper hand over an enemy lower down. All too often you feel as though the landscape is dictating the tactics to you, funneling you down set routes rather than offering you a wide variety of strategic options. Why, why, why, why, why? And why once more? It's OK in *Diablo II*. It's not OK in *Warcraft III*. Slap wrist. The likes of *Shogun*, *Warrior Kings* and *Cossacks* have shown us the



In game cut-scenes are well acted and superbly scripted.



In order to avoid being forced into performing hideous sexual acts on the orcs, the villagers massacred themselves.

be levelled up as you see fit. In combat, your hero is your central unit, and can seriously swing the tide of a battle. Because you manually control their spells, it's up to you to strategically use them to your best advantage, be it to heal some of your troops or cut down the enemy with devastating magical assaults (for more on this see the It's A Kind Of Magic panel). They also carry a small inventory that you can pack to bursting point with magical items found during the course of your adventures.

Despite my earlier rant about a lack of tactical choices,

Warcraft III does offer some interesting touches. Units can't see as far at night, meaning cunningly positioned ambushes can be used to surprise your opponents (especially good in multiplayer). The AI is very solid and units will back each other up intelligently, with healers coming to the aid of their lacerated comrades. Best of all, the game is almost bug-free.

And it gets even better. Oh yes. Because I've saved the best until last. An aspect of *Warcraft III* that elevates it to heights worthy of greatness. I'm not talking about gameplay... not thinking

about the graphics or sound. No, I'm talking about... storyline.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Never in the history of RTS games has there been a more compelling, beautifully presented, well-acted, unclichéd plot than here. A story which pulls you so far into its world you just won't want to leave until the end credits roll gently away and the carnage you have left in your wake becomes just a fading glow of smugness and achievement inside your neglected stomach. Because no matter how annoying some of the missions become, you'll never want to stop playing.



The love child of Jimmy Hill and Bambi's mum makes a special guest appearance.

Never want to stop pushing onto the next cut-scene, be it in-engine or one of the truly incredible FMVs that Blizzard excel in.

The plot (played out from four very different perspectives), takes on a sinister twist-ridden direction, surprising you time and again with its brilliant unpredictability. I don't want to give anything away, but if you are undecided by what I've said so far as to whether to shell out your copper collection for this game, then let this be the decider. If you love a good ol' yarn, then don't miss this one, you really will be depriving yourself of one of the finest plots ever to grace a PC game.

THE END AS WE KNOW IT

But how, I hear you ask, does my story end? Will the mighty *Warcraft III*, new hope of Blizzard, manage to stand against the mighty *Shogun* and *Warrior King*? Or will it be swept aside, left bleeding a slow, pathetic death, reaching out to its vanquishers and coughing out its last with a mouthful of blood? Heed what you have read and decide for yourself, for the outcome of this final battle is ultimately up to you. Whether you align yourself with the tactical freedom of *Shogun* and *Warrior Kings* or the simplicity and accessibility of *Warcraft III* is your choice. But choose wisely my friends, because the RTS war is about to commence. [EW]



Battles are often messy affairs.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Strategically, *Warrior Kings* is light years ahead.

Ooh, where do I start? OK, how about some tactical diversity? You know, like height and terrain advantage, a selection of formations, flanking bonuses, fatigue and morale? Some or all of these would have been welcome additions. After all, if you're using a 3D engine as good as *Warcraft III*'s, then surely you should use it to significantly enhance the gameplay? Right? Yes I understand Blizzard wanted to stay true to its roots and keep things relatively simple, but as it is, *Warcraft III* is so entrenched in the past it's being left far behind by the new kings of the genre. A more free-form approach would also have helped considerably, as attacking enemy bases often becomes a very funnelled and one-dimensional experience.

"If you love a good ol' yarn, then don't miss this one"

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Incredible storyline
- ✓ Easy to pick up
- ✓ Great hero and RPG elements
- ✓ Four sides/campaigns for you to play through
- ✗ Strategically limited
- ✗ Overly repetitive

85

A simplistic, old-fashioned but hugely compelling RTS epic



Ralf has another Aussie nightmare.



The dulllest course of the season lives up to its billing.

GRAND PRIX 4

■ £34.99 | Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Simergy | ETA: Out Now | www.grandprixgames.com

REQUIRES PII 400, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PII 800, as much RAM as you can carry and a GeForce 2 as minimum. A steering wheel would also be nice

It's been a long time coming, but the latest Grand Prix opus is finally here. Paul Presley settles in for what he hopes is the ride of his life

WHETHER IT'S your mother trying a different flavoured marinade on the Sunday lunch, your boss trying a different ill-fitting toupee at the weekly board meeting, or your wife trying a different PVC/rubber combo outfit on the Thursday 'appointment', it's always nice to see people trying something new.

So it is with the fourth of the long-running and long-admired *Grand Prix* series from F1 simulation maestro Geoff Crammond. Not much has changed regarding the actual game, but this time it all comes packaged with a handy in-game F1 DIY guide called the Gpedia.

The idea is that it takes you through all of the horrendously complex car tuning options with step-by-step guides to adjusting your bumpers and flattening your wings and so on. During the preview stages it all sounded like the greatest thing to hit F1 games in years. Can you guess what happens next?

COULDA, WOULD, SHOULD

Something must have got lost in the translation somewhere along the line because the much heralded Gpedia turns out to be little more than an in-game manual. It's certainly no more informative than any of the printed ones that come with every other F1 game out there, except with amateur video footage accompanying the text that makes *Plan 9 From Outer Space* look like an Oscar-worthy masterpiece.

But let's not allow that to distract us. We didn't come here

to read about Formula One, we came here to live it. And I'm happy to report that on the simulation side of things, *Grand Prix 4* is about as perfect a driving experience as it's currently possible to get without strapping yourself to David Coulthard's ample chin. The feeling of control is far superior to that offered in *F1 2002*,

GP4's nearest rival, with vastly improved handling and a greater range of tune-up options.

The sense of racing is also much better than anything we've had before, with AI that on the whole does a grand job of giving you the impression of being in a real battle for the chequered flag. That said, there are a few flies in the ointment of realism. For

example, spin out of control and end up lying across the path of another driver and will they reverse back then steer around your prone car? No, apparently Mika Hakkinen (sadly the teams and drivers are all last seasons) would prefer to continually nudge your car's chassis for half an hour, until the marshals run on to drag you away – marshals who, incidentally, have both balls and bodies of steel as they'll happily run onto the track as other cars scream past at a zillion miles per hour (or 1.6 zillion km per hour if you're feeling metric) before attaching you to the invisible cranes by the side of each track.

There are other questions too. Why are all the driver and team names in lower case? Why can I only save changes to the game's set-up options when I choose to quit the game? Why can't I change my keyboard set-up mid race? Why is there no instant restart for a quick race? Why can't I choose what data is displayed on the steering wheel readout? Why does your pit crew tell you the road is clear for you to pull out of the garage despite the



INPERSPECTIVE

F1 2002

Reviewed Issue 117 Score 84%
While the feeling of control in *F1 2002* is inferior to *Grand Prix 4*, it is far more accessible to the newcomer.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

Reviewed Issue 98 Score 86%
A different kind of racing and a better understanding of gameplay. *McRae 3* should be here soon though, so wait on a bit, eh?



That's me at the back there.



Animated pit crews make a welcome debut in the series.



The teams and drivers are from last season.

fact that there are four other cars all accelerating in your direction? Why? Why? Why?

RAZZLE-DAZZLE

The emphasis being on simulation over gameplay throws up other problems. What if you want the accuracy but don't want to drive for either Ferrari, Williams or McLaren? Without the option for team improvement over seasons, either through the purchase or development of better equipment, you're not really going to have much chance of success if you opt to drive for one of the smaller teams such as Minardi or BAR, no matter how much you tinker with the spring stiffness or ride height.

And what about the sense of achievement or reward? Certainly, there's a feeling of progress as you get to grips with each track, learn each corner and push the speed envelope a little further with each lap. But a brief, generic animation sequence after a race doesn't really offer any major incentive to keep plugging away. You don't even get a grid walk before a race – practically a staple for any F1 game.

What we're still not getting, despite all the authenticity shown in the driving side of the game, is a true sense of being a F1 driver. It's all too easy to get carried away praising the accuracy of the simulation that Crammond has produced here, hailing *GP4* as the finest driving game of all

time and that, but *F1* is about more than just the driving.

ANORAKS AREN'T THE ONLY FRUIT

If I've sounded rather negative throughout this review it's only

nothing to touch *Grand Prix 4*. Absolutely the best, no question. But gameplay, people.

Gameplay, gameplay, gameplay. This whole genre needs a shot in the arm if it's going to start appealing to an audience beyond

"Grand Prix 4 is top of the pile. Graphically lush, anally detailed and with some of the best AI to date"

because this could have – no, deserves to have been the definitive F1 game on the market. You can't ask for a finer pedigree than Geoff Crammond, and from a simulation point of view there's

obsessive F1 petrolheads. Otherwise all you're getting with each new game is little more than a graphical and statistics update (see panel). I have absolutely no interest in the American sport of

TOCA racing. None. But the imminent new TOCA game has my attention, perhaps more than any other driving game out there, simply because it's attempting something new with its story and career-based gameplay.

That's the lesson F1 developers need to learn. We don't just want to compete with Michael Schumacher on the track, we want to compete with him off the track as well. Don't just make us drive. Make us care. Saying that, though, *GP4* is top of the pile. Graphically lush, anally detailed (the telemetry options alone are staggeringly comprehensive, not to mention the car setup options) and with some of the best AI to date, it edges out EA's offering for pole position. You won't find a more accurate racing sim anywhere, and no F1 fan should be without a copy. Let's just hope that next time, Crammond and co put some soul into what's an otherwise superb simulation. **PCW**

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Here we see *F1RC*, the oldest of the bunch by more than a year.Then of course there's *F1 2002*, EA's bi-weekly update.And finally *GP4*. Who's the fairest of them all? It's up to you.

CAN YOU TELL ONE F1 GAME FROM ANOTHER?

So which of the various Formula One titles should you swap your shillings and sixpence for? The three best contenders are *Grand Prix 4*, EA's

F1 2002 and *F1 Racing Championship* from Ubi Soft. *Grand Prix 4* is the most realistic, while *F1 2002* has some pretty good training options. *F1 Racing Challenge*

is considerably inferior to both though. However, it is interesting to see just how similar they all look. Compare and contrast if you will.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Superb simulation
- ✓ Gorgeous graphics
- ✓ Excellent racing
- ✗ Moments of absurdity
- ✗ Basic gameplay structure
- ✗ Gpedia is a waste

86

Front of the grid



Sit back and watch as countless enemy hordes destroy all your hard work.

Upgrade your settlements in order to strengthen your military defences.

KOHAN: AHRIMAN'S GIFT

■ £19.99 | Pub: Strategy First | Dev: Timegate Studios | ETA: TBC | www.timegate.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb graphics card **DESIRES** 128Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card or higher will help things tick along more smoothly

It's an expansion, but it sure doesn't feel like it, claims Chris Anderson

KOHAN: *Ahriman's Gift*, is a stand-alone expansion for *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns*, and in many ways is much the same game as its predecessor: an RTS set in a mythical setting. However, now we have established all of that, it might be a good idea to explain why

It's quite simple really. The original *Kohan* was a bit of a drudge to get through. An unconvincing storyline combined with a very limited amount of units and technology, along with some unbalanced gameplay was never going to win any awards from us. Even so, it was an average

what the hell to do next, as *Ahriman's Gift* features a huge diversity of strategic options that cater for all styles of play, and subsequently, extend the game's shelf-life considerably. Should you upgrade your settlements or improve your economy? Should you spend your gold on more defences or develop your military power instead? Of course there are a variety of complications and repercussions involved with each of these choices as well, meaning that making the right decision is no easy thing. A bad decision can spell total disaster, and you'll soon find that disasters can occur very quickly later on in the game, when the difficulty level is cranked up considerably.

It's no classic, but it's a huge improvement on what was an average game. If you bought the original, you really should feel perfectly justified taking it back to the shop you bought it from and asking for this instead. I know I would.

✎



Huge pitched battles are the rule rather than the exception.

"It's the game *Kohan* should have been upon release"

the original game achieved a score of 50 per cent but the expansion has managed to rack up a score of 78 per cent.

RTS and mildly playable in a mindless sort of way.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

In contrast, *Ahriman's Gift* has a huge selection of units and technologies to develop, and the gameplay is much more balanced and actually provides a formidable challenge this time around. In other words, it's the game *Kohan* should have been upon release. Think of it as a kind of patch that 'fixes' everything wrong with the gameplay from the last game, and you won't be far off.

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

You'll probably find that most of your time is spent wondering

INPERSPECTIVE

AGE OF EMPIRES II

Reviewed Issue 84, Score 90%
Prettier graphics along with more more balanced gameplay make *AOE II* a better bet all round.

WARCRAFT III:

REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%
Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos places less emphasis on economy and more on hero development and combat. It's a much more playable game despite a similarly archaic approach to gameplay.



PCZONE VERDICT

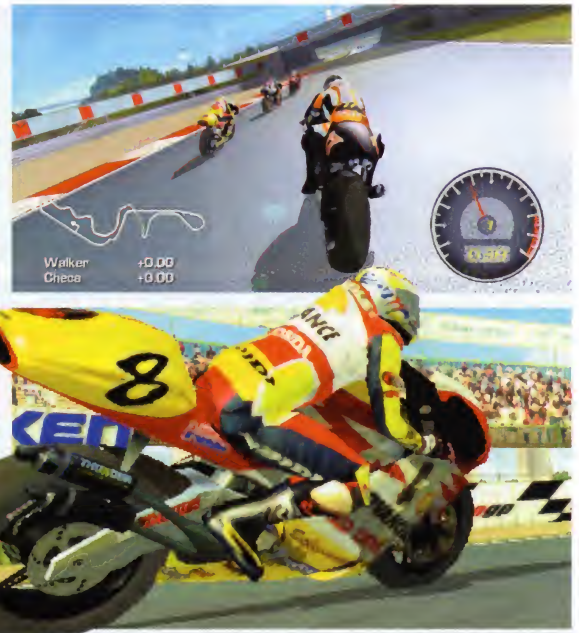
- ✓ Hugely addictive
- ✓ Vast array of units and technologies
- ✓ It's the game that *Kohan* should have been
- ✗ It's 2D
- ✗ Dated and uninspiring graphics
- ✗ Nothing you haven't seen before

78

No looker, but it's a solid and playable RTS



What's a racing game without a Ferris wheel in the background?



Perpetual under-achiever Chris Walker zips by.

MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY

■ £29.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Climax | ETA: Out Now | www.thq.com/motogp

REQUIRES PIII 450, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800 and a 32Mb 3D card

The 2001 MotoGP 500cc series is now available on your PC. Phil Wand gets leathered up

BIKE GAMES don't cut it. Each year we see new riders, fresh bikes, updated decals, gleaming reflections, better physics, funky music, realistic weather conditions and an increasingly complex Ferris wheel revolving slowly on the horizon, but the faults and criticisms inherent to the genre remain, and *MotoGP* does nothing to change our minds.

CONTROL FREAK

To start with, you can't go motorcycling with a keyboard or a gamepad, and the balance required in real racing simply isn't reproduced well here. Also, the fact that the one usable camera angle floats some metres behind the exhaust

pipe only exacerbates the feeling of detachment, as the onboard camera leans alarmingly with the bike. The programmer who put it there was seemingly unaware that riders keep their eyes parallel to the road.

When the horizon isn't pitching drunkenly left and right, your rider is flat on the tank, flashing down the back straight before braking heavily on a

be as deep nor as throaty as a V-twin Ducati, it's still a noise that should make you want to crank the volume clockwise rather than turn it off and blow raspberries instead. Fans of fast bikes simply adore spine-chilling soundtracks, and a half dozen Remington Fuzz-Aways trapped inside your speakers is not a worthy substitute. We're beginning to think that nobody will get it right.

"If you're a 500cc nut and have to have all the 2001 riders and machinery, then it's well worth forking out for"

corner and T-boning opponents into the nearest billboard. Ahem. Racing is about the ability to make progress with smooth, liquid movements, each turn flowing gracefully into the next. Because you can't replicate this skill with fingers and thumbs, *MotoGP* leaves you feeling disconnected and with little urge to play the game properly.

NOISES OFF

Then there's the bugbear of every motorsport title, sound. While a two-stroke racing Yamaha won't

MotoGP isn't without its high points. Network multiplayer and split-screen races are a real whiz, chiefly because the PC version goes one better than crappy console-style head-to-heads and allows you to challenge a full pack of racers. Jostling with human friends and computer foes on one track is really rather enjoyable. Then there's the wet weather races, boasting the most realistic rain, thunder, lightning and spray yet – it looks like water droplets are actually gathering on the inside



Riders will look round, raise an arm and shake their fist.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Realistic wet weather graphics
- ✓ Solid AI
- ✓ AI controlled bikes in multiplayer
- ✗ Sound
- ✗ Not even remotely like riding a bike
- ✗ Some iffy textures

72

It's a bike game!

INPERSPECTIVE

SUPERBIKE 2000

Reviewed Issue 88 Score 75%
Full of great features but is looking decidedly dated now.

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

Reviewed Issue 92 Score 80%
Baja races, outdoor nationals, indoor supercross events and a stunt mode makes this a fun alternative to the non-fun approach taken by most other bike sims.



The crowd goes wild during a rare slice of action.



"Howzaaaaaat?" Looks like the umpire agrees on this occasion.

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN 2002

■ £19.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Empire Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.empireinteractive.com

REQUIRES P133 and 16Mb RAM DESIRES P11 233 and 32Mb RAM

Howzat?! Steve Hill puts on his whites and tells us exactly how it is

HOW depressing. Another English summer and I'm sat indoors clicking a mouse as a vague approximation of a game of cricket takes place on the monitor. That's what you get for being PC ZONE's resident sports specialist. While other reviewers get to travel six pages worth of fantasy worlds, quashing goblins or slaughtering enemy troops, I am stuck with another moribund game of bat and ball.

Alongside more high profile sports games, Empire's annual cricket extravaganza has now become a firmly entrenched part of the PC's (anti)social calendar. What's most upsetting is that it is to all intents and purposes exactly the same game that I was sat playing almost a year



The third umpire relays the bad news.

ago to the day. In fact, whoever wrote the manual would appear to agree, offering this contrary but telling advice: "To start

Tennis and a pointless Graham Thorpe endorsement. Admittedly, the data has also been updated, and if you own the last version,

"With a well positioned ashtray you can actually let the game play itself"

International Cricket Captain 2002: Select INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN 2001...

THE DATA DAY

To be honest, you might as well do just that, as the only tangible difference is the tragic loss of the iconic Booker T & The MG's theme tune, the addition of some adverts for *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua*

this can be the only reason for buying it, although you would have to be a rampant cricket fan to reap the benefits. Of course, this exact same argument can be applied to *Champ Manager*, every updated version of which unfailingly breaks all sales records. That game does at least make minor tweaks to the match engine though, which is not the

case here. In fact, it doesn't look to have been improved since 1984. Last year we compared it to a Commodore 64 game, and that may have been generous.

It does a passable job though, offering highlights of all, some, or none of the action, depending on your preference. When you first start playing, you're tempted to watch every ball. When that starts to drag, you opt to view just every score of four or more, then every wicket chance, then just every wicket, and then no highlights at all, until eventually you stop playing it. This cycle can take up to three days, and while it lasts, it makes for an undeniably absorbing game. Although your involvement in it is rather limited, mainly revolving around setting the aggression or otherwise of your batters and bowlers. In fact, with a well-positioned ashtray on the Enter key, you can actually let the game play itself while you go and do something more interesting instead.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Looking at the bigger picture, a full career mode is available, offering the opportunity to trade

players and put them through simplistic training routines. It's by no means as involving as a football management equivalent though, simply because of the way the sport works. That said, we have to concede that this is, almost by default, the definitive cricket management game. If you have a thing for batting averages and silly mid-offs, you could feasibly play it indefinitely, and for less than 20 quid the annual update may be worth the outlay. We just can't imagine anyone getting too excited about it. **[CZ]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Comprehensive representation of the sport
- ✓ Commentary from Jonathan 'Aggers' Agnew
- ✓ Cheap
- ✗ Rank graphics
- ✗ All the pitches are identical
- ✗ You soon get bored

62

Same as it ever was

INPERSPECTIVE

INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN - THE ASHES EDITION 2001

Reviewed Issue 106, Score 66%
Last year's data, same engine, same game and half the price.

CRICKET 2002

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 70%
Proper 3D graphics and a more arcade approach to the sport.



The impressive overview screen makes navigation a doddle.



Always find a good location for your first store.



Chop down trees, cut planks and then turn them into money-spinning goods.



Here comes the train.



And zooming in is just as much fun.

INDUSTRY GIANT II

£34.99 | Pub: Interactive Magic | Dev: JoWood | ETA: Out Now | www.industrygiant2.com

REQUIRES PIII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 500, 64Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Who better to found a big business empire than economic midget Andrew Wright?

OVER the years build 'em up gamers have been treated to everything from virtual cities to railroads, theme parks, zoos and even hotels. And even if they've all been a bit niche, they've also been quite fun. The original *Industry Giant* was a trade simulation that was released in 1998 to hoots of derision from the team, so we were interested to see if this sequel could claw back some capital and turn in some kind of profit.

INPERSPECTIVE

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

Reviewed issue 75, Score 87%
It might be a narrower 'business' environment but at least titles like *RollerCoaster Tycoon* and *Theme Park* inject a little fun into your creation.

MONOPOLY TYCOON

Reviewed issue 110, Score 78%
Mixes elements from the boardgame with *SimCity*-style building elements. More polished than *IGII*, but the fun quickly wanes.

Your business plan (circa 1900) is to build up an economic empire from scratch and take it right through to the age of information technology (circa 2000). First step is to open some kind of store, then fill it with goods and sell them in the existing towns and cities which amble along in *SimCity* fashion. For example, you open a grocery store. Now you have to harvest something – eggs, meat, milk and other goods – by building a farm and a storage site for the goods.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Nice and simple – but to sell washing machines, for instance, you have to mine iron ore and turn it into steel and copper ore, then turn it into wire and finally electric engines. When you've got supplies of both steel and engines, you can build and sell washing machines. But beware, there isn't a huge demand for them before about 1940...

While *Industry Giant II* bears some similarities to the original, it also adds several major improvements. Multiplayer mode

toys and musical instruments. You can even build your empire on disposable nappies if you're so inclined – at least you can

"You can even build your empire on disposable nappies"

introduces team and head-to-head play over a LAN or the Internet, as well as a skirmish mode using the 20 supplied maps. There are now a total of 150 raw materials and end products to choose from, ranging from precious metals and oil, to

after they've been invented in 1962. Business is also much more complex and is affected by seasonal demand. And there are more than 50 different transport options, ranging from rail and road, to ship and air.

LOOKING GOOD

Technically the game has grown up a lot – smooth zooming action at high resolutions make your thriving industry sites, cities and transport network a joy to watch. In fact, you can get so wrapped up in it that it's easy to forget to pay full attention to all the details (and there are plenty of them) of your empire, especially as there aren't enough warnings when

some minor cog in your wheel goes bad.

IGII is highly addictive, even though the campaigns can at times lack a bit of direction and purpose. However, it's easy to master, and all things considered it's one of the most entertaining tycoon games we've seen in a while. While it's not a giant in its genre, it's also not the giant bore it threatened to be either. **71**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Loads a things to make and sell
- ✓ Neat and easy interface
- ✓ Impressive real-time graphics
- ✗ Not enough direction
- ✗ Lacks longevity

71

Competent if unspectacular sim



Once you've built the mounted docking bay, you can start constructing 'proper' units.



Protect the mothership at all costs.

STARMAGEDDON: PROJECT EARTH

■ £29.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Lemon Interactive | ETA: August 9 | www.lemon-interactive.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb GeForce 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.1Ghz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb GeForce 3D card

Can this rising RTS star outshine Homeworld? Keith Pullin finds out

POOR Mindscape. While browsing through the last couple of issues of *PC ZONE* it appears we haven't been particularly kind to its games. It's nothing personal of course; it's just that its last couple of offerings have been erm... a bit shabby.

Fortunately, though, *Starmageddon: Project Earth* is anything but – in fact, it's a very decent game. However, this momentous, all-singing, all-dancing, great 3D RTS hope also coincides with the budget release of the much acclaimed *Homeworld*, which of course begs the question, will *Starmageddon* be able to

compete with such an established heavyweight? Let's find out shall we?

FRUIT & FIBRE

Cruel twists of fate aside, Mindscape and developer Lemon Interactive can be extremely proud of *Starmageddon*. As a story it's

However, as a visual feast, *Starmageddon* excels. There are plasma trails galore, beautiful glowing engines and mighty laser weapons and explosions. The backgrounds are also stunningly detailed with such wonders as fiery meteors hurtling through the vacuum and distant spiralling galaxies.

Playing *Starmageddon* is a truly evocative experience. The alien spacecraft in particular (or Daemons to give them their proper name) give off a suitably menacing atmosphere. The human ships are also impressive even if they're not quite up to the standard of the ominous aliens, but needless to say, whichever side you ultimately choose to play, your eyes won't complain.

Your fingers should be pretty content too. The interface has been designed with the left mouse button firmly in mind. All units are moved with this button, and by pressing Ctrl you can bring up a list of construction and unit

behaviour options. You also have a maximum of three motherships on any one mission, and by hitting F1 to F3 you can flip between these. The intuitive design of the interface means there is no messy fumbling

nothing special; the 'aliens attack Earth' plot has been done to death and the cut-scenes are typically cheesy attempts at making a clichéd script sound even less dramatic than you could possibly imagine.

INPERSPECTIVE

HOMEWORLD

Reviewed Issue 82 Score 94%
The best all-round 3D space RTS ever made, make no mistake about it. And now you can buy it for a fiver.
CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS
Reviewed Issue 109 Score 82%
Conquest is played in 2D across numerous systems linked together via wormholes. It's uglier, but more involving than *Starmageddon*.

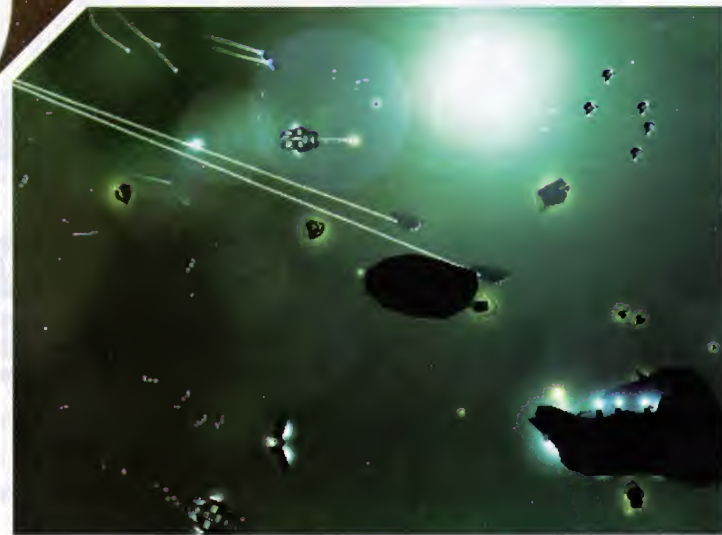




You're never short of a camera view or two.



Space has never looked this good, but the units can sometimes suffer from poor AI.



The galactic battles take place on a massive scale.

around when it comes to selecting units or controlling the 3D camera and radar.

SOME MOTHERS DO 'AVE 'EM

Despite having the ability to flip from one mothership to another with the 'F' keys, a tactical game this certainly is not. There are only a handful of different units per side leaving little scope for imaginative attacks. *Starmageddon* is essentially about which side can build the biggest force in the shortest space of time.

On top of this, none of the motherships truly interact with each other on the battlefield, so effectively, the whole multiple

that both motherships are hopelessly outnumbered from the word go, you just don't have enough time to collect resources to build your fleet. Before you know it, wave upon wave of alien spacecraft are pissing all over you. Determination against overwhelming odds and no shortage of patience are the requirements here – and if you've got those, it's a good indication you might just stick it out for the next dozen or so missions.

METEOR MADNESS

There's also a huge reliance on resource collection (ore from asteroids in this case), so expect the first few minutes of every mission to be spent waiting for

also noticed that the human campaign in particular seems a lot tougher than the Daemons; whether through design or error, the Daemon units are apparently

cheaper, quicker to build and more effective in battle.

There are other problems to contend with though. Units suffer from poor AI, especially when

they've just been constructed and ejected from your mothership into space. On later missions this can be fatal; instead of heading off to destroy the hoard of ships attacking your base, they simply float around waiting for you to change their mode to 'aggressive'. It's an extra mouse-click you just don't need.

When it comes down to it, *Starmageddon* is a slightly frustrating, yet very accessible, enjoyable and uncomplicated RTS space experience. But alas, it doesn't come near the sheer all-round quality of *Homeworld*. However, if you've played *Homeworld* to death, you'll find more than enough to enjoy in *Starmageddon* to warrant picking up a copy. **B+**

"There are plasma trails galore, beautiful glowing engines and mighty laser weapons and explosions"

mothership idea is just an added complication rather than a useful innovation.

On mission three, for example, you control two motherships. One of them must destroy a jumpgate, while the other has to utterly wipe out an alien base. Apart from the fact

your harvesters to return. But even if the ancient concept of 'build and kill' is simple in theory, in practice *Starmageddon* is a hugely challenging game. There are no difficulty settings, so whether you like it or not you'll find yourself thrown into the deep-end fairly early on. And we

SUNDIVERS



Everything you do is in front of the TV cameras.

DID SOMEBODY PUT CAMERAS IN SPACE FOR OUR CONVENIENCE, OR WERE THEY THERE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING OF TIME?

Apparently the huge motherships featured in *Starmageddon* are actually controlled by thought power alone. The pilots, or to use the proper term, the 'sundivers' merge their brains with their ship to guide it, and a nearby camera through space. It may sound clever, but really, it's all just a hastily contrived excuse by the programmers to explain why there are cameras in space watching everything you do. Ah, *Big Brother* – now it's even reached the stars...

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Sublime graphics
- ✓ Easy to get into
- ✓ Challenging
- ✗ Some glitchy AI
- ✗ Unbalanced sides
- ✗ Poor story and cut-scenes

74

Tough, yet playable



AOWII is more concerned with developing your characters and cities than its more exploration and combat orientated predecessor.

AGE OF WONDERS II: THE WIZARD'S THRONE



■ £29.99 | Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Triumph Studios | ETA: Out now | <http://aow2.godgames.com>

REQUIRES Pentium II 300, 64mb and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Turn-based strategy games are enjoying a revival of late. Chris Anderson takes as long as he likes thinking about what to say next



Surprisingly pleasant combat graphics for a turn-based game.



Auto-resolve the battles or fight them yourself.

IT'S inevitable that at some point games within a genre stop being original and start becoming little more than rehashes of each other. Which is exactly what is starting to happen in the world of turn-based strategy games. Go and play *Heroes Of Might And Magic IV*, then come back and play *Age Of*

Wonders II, and tell me I'm wrong. There really is very little to differentiate between the two. But does that make *Age Of Wonders II* a bad game, though? No, of course it doesn't, it just makes it a supremely unimaginative rip-off of what made the *Heroes* series great, which in turn makes it, well, rather good.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

The familiar premise goes thus: find a hero, recruit characters for your cause while you travel around the game map. Grab any loot you come across. Build a city, improve it as funds permit, hire more warriors and magic units and send them off to clonk the enemy on the head. Research and cast spells, and so on and so forth ad infinitum. There's not a whole

bunch of innovative stuff here, though unlike the first game you now get bigger, more detailed maps as well as more involvement in developing your cities. And as you are now a

wizard, researching magical attributes and ever more powerful spells from the seven magical spheres plays a much greater role. As you'd expect, combat is played out in turns, and you can either assign tactics and orders individually to your units or simply click the auto button and watch them strut their stuff. However, if you choose this option you risk losing some of your better units if they don't keep themselves out of harm's way, which, due to some erratic AI, they seldom do.

BUT IT LOOKS GOOD...

Age Of Wonders II, in all fairness, is quite graphically impressive (well, for a turn-based strategy game

anyway). All the characters and environments are rich and detailed, and even battle graphics are fairly decent unless you zoom in close on them, at which point they become blurred and low on detail.

So, should you buy it? Well, if you already have *Heroes Of Might And Magic IV* and you want to play it again with different graphics, go right ahead. If you are new to this genre, *Age Of Wonders II* is as good an introduction to it as you will get, and the fact that it's not quite as complex as *Heroes IV* may well make it a better title for beginners. In closing then, *AOWII* is not quite as good as the title it seeks so desperately to 'emulate', but it's damned close. **PC**

INPERSPECTIVE

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV

Reviewed Issue 115, Score 84%
The same game with different graphics and a tad more depth. Hardcore RPG fans, this is your game.

ETHERLORDS

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 87%
This is the same game too, spookily enough, but with spectacular battle graphics. Eye-candy enthusiasts, this is your game.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Pretty graphics
- ✓ Addictive and highly replayable
- ✓ More diversity than before
- ✗ Breathtakingly unoriginal
- ✗ Lacks the depth of *HOMM*
- ✗ Too time consuming for some

82

Heroes Age Of Might And Magic Wonders II



Replays are extremely impressive affairs.



That man has no dignity.



If I wasn't such a gentleman I would have had you out there.

CRICKET 2002

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: HB Studios | ETA: Out Now | www.easportscricket.com

REQUIRES PIII 300, 64Mb RAM (128Mb for Windows 2000/XP) and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 500, 128Mb RAM (256Mb for Windows 2000/XP) and a 16Mb 3D card

I don't like cricket: I love it. Or not. Steve Hill enters a corridor of uncertainty

AT THE time of writing, it's a soggy summer's day, the World Cup is but an expensive memory, television offers blanket coverage of Wimbledon, and the football season is still six suffocating weeks away. As if to mock my torment, another cricket game drops on the doormat, courtesy of our deopmat, friends of EA Sports. The *Cricket* series has been around in various guises for a number of years, but has yet to really trouble the nation in the manner of the ubiquitous *FIFA* monster. Perhaps surprisingly, the last instalment was *Cricket 2000*, which by EA Sports'

standards represents a hiatus of Cro-Magnon proportions.

Over the history of the series, the only real constant has been the laconic commentary of funny-faced Antipodean, Richie Benaud, and he is back once again, although David Gower has been replaced by the brasher tones of Jim Maxwell, whoever he is. Suffice to say that it's a seamless affair,

and representative of the general quality of the package. You know the score; it's an EA Sports title, so expect television style presentation, countless camera angles, meticulously modelled stadia, intricate detail and superfluous idle animations from the masters of polish. It is all present and correct, and, as seems to be the goal, it's like a television programme that you control.

WILLOW THE WISP

This would all be for now if the interface was useless, but fortunately this isn't the case. Cricket has never been the easiest of sports to replicate, but this makes a reasonable fist of it, with bowling involving the positioning of a green disc, and batting requiring you to swing the willow in the immediate vicinity of said circle.

Both disciplines take some mastering, and while it's effective enough, it's not always entirely

convincing. Even when taking a wicket or hitting a six, there's always the nagging doubt that you are not completely sure how you did it.

LINE & LENGTH

There is some subtlety at work though, and the various bowling styles require markedly different approaches, with the pitch

experience. It's easy to let a few hours slide by and it's amazing how involved you can become.

While it's tempting to try and lash every ball out of the ground, a more measured approach is generally required and there is plenty of scope for thought. You'll get bored of it eventually, but while it lasts, it's another quality product from EA Sports. **PCZ**

"Playing an entire test would try the patience of a monk"

and the weather also affecting play and tactics.

It's not just the mechanics of cricket that aren't particularly suitable, there's also the fact that a match can last five days. Playing an entire test match would try the patience of a monk, let alone the average attention-deficit gamer. The limited overs game is where the immediate value is to be had (the more limited the better) and it can make for a mildly engrossing

INPERSPECTIVE

INTERNATIONAL

CRICKET CAPTAIN 2002

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 62%

More management-oriented, with crap graphics.

BRIAN LARA CRICKET

Reviewed Issue 75 Score 85%

Very dated in every way, it's not a patch on *Cricket 2002*.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Immaculate presentation
- ✓ Highly authentic
- ✗ Repetitive action
- ✗ Questionable interaction

70

I don't mind cricket

ZANZARAH: THE HIDDEN PORTAL

■ £29.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Funatics | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 400, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHZ, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin's away with the fairies in a surprisingly entertaining adventure



Playing at fairies isn't something we'd recommend.



Zanzarah is the exception to the rule though.



Combat is a first-person affair.

ON THE surface, *Zanzarah: The Hidden Portal* may appear childish and unsuitable for a mature PC audience (we're talking fighting fairies here). Yet to my surprise, it's actually a surprisingly playable blend of third-person RPG/adventure and no-nonsense FPS.

Playing the part of a heroine named Amy, your mission is to save the world of Zanzarah from evil fairies and elves. Effectively this means hiring several 'good' fairy bouncers for protection and chatting to swamp goblins, dwarves, pixies and other peculiar beasts to procure items and clues to help in your quest.

Combat takes place in the aforementioned FPS mode and sees your fairies (you can have a maximum of five per battle that you can flip between) take on wild fairies in a FPS deathmatch scenario. Fairies can be equipped with offensive and defensive magic powers and they gain experience and spells by

dispatching their foes. You can also capture new fairies (there are 77 in total) and train them up.

Ultimately, *Zanzarah's* juvenile subject matter may limit its appeal, but praise is still due to developer Funatics for being adventurous and trying something different. In short, *Zanzarah* is *Pokémon* meets

Unreal Tournament with a splattering of Nintendo's *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. What's more, it's a great attempt at an original game. Well worth a look. **P2**

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

79

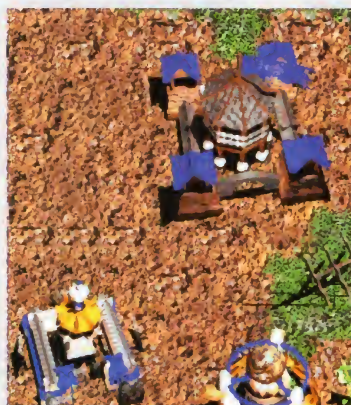
Fairy good

MYTHICAL WARRIORS

■ £14.99 | Pub: Greenstreet Entertainment Software | Dev: Outerbound Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P200 and 32Mb RAM DESIRES PII 450, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card

Fantasy meets RTS, again. Chris Anderson goes through the motions



No manual, no originality, no atmosphere, no longevity, no nothing.



Even for £15 you shouldn't touch *Mythical Warriors* with a bargepole.



THIS IS one of those games that literally screams the word 'amateur' at you the moment you begin to play it. Dire graphics and laughable character animations don't get *Mythical Warriors* off to a good start, but the hugely repetitive and unrewarding gameplay

combine with the lacklustre presentation to ensure this title will be taking its rightful place in the bin as soon as this review is finished.

It speaks volumes for the lack of depth in the game that it comes without a paper manual of any sort. Instead there are a

couple of pages of text accessible from the main game screen to tell you all you need to know about the game from beginning to end. The actual game mechanics tread familiar territory: choose one of two sides and build structures and collect resources to amass sufficient

numbers of military units to go and kill the enemy before they do the same thing to you. However, it's all delivered in such an unconvincing manner and without the slightest attempt to create a believable atmosphere, that it's unlikely you'll get further than three or four missions into it

before uninstalling and pretending it never happened. Not a classic then, clearly. **P2**

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

18

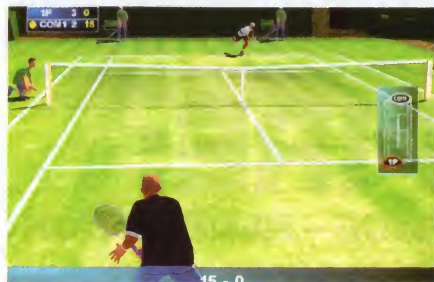
A criminal waste of CD space

AGASSI TENNIS GENERATION 2002

■ £24.99 | Pub: Cryo Interactive | Dev: Aqua Pacific | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Anyone for tennis? Just Steve Hill then



Look, a different camera angle.



Clay courts as well.



Two times the misery.

SURPRISE, surprise: another tennis game, cunningly released to coincide with Wimbledon upon our screens. Presumably the logic was that you will see Andre flexing his muscles on centre court and be immediately compelled to go out and buy his game. Shame he got knocked out in the second round then. Of course, buying this game just because

it's endorsed by Agassi would be the action of a fool, much like Agassi's decision to lend his name to this game.

Reviewing this on a borderline minimum spec PC, it proved to be muck of the highest order, with the computer controlled players largely incapable of hitting the ball, rendering matches little more than a banal sequence of

unlikely aces and tedious double faults. However, on a slightly better machine, they are mysteriously able to return serves and take part in vaguely competitive rallies. It's flummoxed us, and we can only suggest that if you're packing anything less than the desired spec you give this a wide berth.

You won't be missing much, as it's average at best, with the

shiny-pated Agassi going up against 31 fictional players over a reasonable spread of courts and game modes. It's sporadically playable, although occasionally drifts into bullet time of its own volition. Even when the game works properly, the elongated cut-scenes that follow virtually every point are infuriating, requiring you to constantly slap the space bar to

remove them. The commentary consists of little more than the occasional phrase, and the whole thing smacks of being rushed. Either get yourself a copy of *Virtua Tennis* or stick to watching Wimbledon. **[FV]**

PCZONE VERDICT **40**
Fault

DINO ISLAND

■ £24.99 | Pub: Montecristo | ETA: Out Now



Surround the dinosaurs with cages, then surround the punters with hot dog stands.

IT MUST have sounded great at the board meeting: *Theme Park* meets *Jurassic Park* in full 3D. The result, of course, is pure tripe. First of all, it looks worse than the awful *Theme Park World* and it sadly adopts a humorous and cuddly angle to dinosaurs. Your job is to build a

zoo for these prehistoric creatures, research and manipulate their DNA, clone them, feed them and then surround them with fair ground rides and hamburger stalls. The interface isn't too bad, but the constant micro-management required (though not as bad as

Zoo Tycoon in that respect) and some messy design, confirm it as a ball of dung of T-Rex sized proportions. They haven't even got the timing right. The dino craze died out years ago. **(MH)**

PCZONE VERDICT **30**

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ II

■ £9.99 | Pub: THQ | ETA: Out Now



I'm sorry, I haven't got a clue.



I can't bear the tension.

DO YOU know your Ramon Vega from your Vincent Vega? Kirsty Gallagher certainly does, and she plays the role of quizmaster in this uneagerly awaited sequel. Considering her involvement in Channel 4's inane new morning show, *R1:SE*, this isn't the worst thing she's done, and if nothing else, she looks stunning in the entirely gratuitous photos that accompany the installation procedure.

Essentially a rehash of last November's original release, *Sky Sports Football Quiz II* throws up

thousands of new questions to test how much of your brain you have wasted in storing ultimately meaningless information. Four different game types are offered, and up to four players can compete, although we can't quite imagine crowding round the PC after a night on the ale. It's unlikely to cover THQ's losses after the debacle of the now defunct *Sky Sports Football Manager*, but for less than a tenner you can't complain. **(SH)**

PCZONE VERDICT **50**

REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough



Severance is one of the most violent games ever.

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

LAY DOWN the plastic sheeting, here comes *Severance*. It's easy to forget just how messy this game is and within seconds of beginning your quest, blood flows freely and limbs start flying. This most certainly is not a game for the squeamish – or your kids.

What it is though, is an example of how gratuitous violence can be properly employed to enhance gameplay and atmosphere. *Severance* does not fall into the trap of using explicit decapitation and dismemberment for shock purposes alone. The violence in the game is extreme, of that there can be no doubt, but to actually achieve a satisfying beheading you need to put in a serious amount of practice to master a dazzling array of special combos. There are also four different characters to play as, with each one having different strengths and weapon specialisation.

This means as you wander around the sublime looking levels of *Severance*, you actually get more satisfaction from the fact that you've successfully pulled off a tricky manoeuvre rather than from the actual blood and gore itself. The victorious feeling the game manages to convey is also down to ingenious enemy AI that sees some of the more advanced creatures dodge, block and counter-attack with eerie skill and agility.

Severance is still one of the most playable action games around and in our opinion was sorely overlooked by a lot of magazines and consumers on its initial release. We urge you to give it a try now, at this price it would be criminal not to.

Keith Pullin

PCZONE VERDICT

85



He doesn't look very friendly, does he?



It lacks depth, but that didn't stop *Diablo* and *Dungeon Siege* from being hits.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – REDEMPTION

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

FEW GAMES have divided opinion as severely as *Vampire* did. There was so much expectation and build-up and the screenshots looked so damn good, everyone thought it was going to change RPGs forever. In truth though it was an extremely linear experience offering little interaction and very basic hack 'n' slash combat. The much-hyped Storyteller online mode never took off either. But for all its faults I loved it, and I know many of you did too.

First of all, the graphics are so gorgeous you can just walk into a room and stare at the décor for a few minutes. It still looks amazing when compared with the latest games, even if the price for those looks is a total lack of depth. The thing that

really makes the game though, is the fabulous story and characterisation – which is almost good enough to compete with any of the titles in this month's Supertest. You play a crusader who lives to fight evil in all its forms but who is then, during the course of the game, turned into a vampire. What follows is his struggle to contain his inner demon (suck on too many innocent victims and you lose control) and his quest through the ages to find the love of his life and achieve redemption. Come to this with the right expectations and you'll find one of the most underrated RPGs in recent memory.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

84



The action is frenetic with bumper-to-bumper mayhem from start to finish.

TOCA 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

WITH THE brand spanking new *TOCA: Race Driver* just around the corner, this amounts to a timely re-release for this minor driving classic from Codemasters. And classic it is, or at least was, back in issue 76, where we declared that the driving model had been tweaked to perfection with the ability to select your own playing style between sim and arcade. The *TOCA* license also means bumper-to-bumper action, which sets it apart from *Colin McRae*, and provides a completely different driving experience: qualify, race for the first corner and try to keep your nose in front, while avoiding the stunt from behind.

It's testament to the quality of the game that it still holds up now. The visuals, which were state of the art back in May '99, are still reasonable today and the drive still packs a meaty challenge that will give you hours of play way beyond what you should reasonably expect from a £5 note. As a matter of interest we've played the latest *TOCA* game and we reckon it's going to be the one that puts this series at the top of the driving tree. Until then, this is one of the best ways to spend little and enjoy a lot.

David Woods

PCZONE VERDICT

84



It's long, but *Tomb Raider III* is nowhere near as enjoyable as the original.

TOMB RAIDER III

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

WE'RE SO SICK of the sight of her by now, it's easy to forget Lara starred in one of the most original, enjoyable and influential 3D games ever made. Everybody remembers their first encounter with the T-Rex in *Tomb Raider*, or the first time they pulled off a side-summersault to catch the edge of a ledge. But can anyone remember anything remarkable from any of the sequels? By this third instalment it was becoming clear that Core was content just repackaging the same game every Christmas, using the same production-line mentality we've come to expect from *FIFA* releases. Yes, there were a couple of new moves and some new vehicles, but gameplay was

synonymous with déjà vu. Since this is basically a new set of scenarios for the original game, all the problems remain: the terrible camera angles, the frustrating precision required for a lot of acrobatic moves, the endless pulling of levers and switches masquerading as puzzles. Forget about story and characterisation here. The recent screen ride (calling it a film is stretching semantics a bit too far) showed just what a vacuous character Lara is. Of course, it's entertaining for a bit but, remember, in the end it's just a platform game.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

72

QUAKE II

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now



Incredible when we first reviewed it, but incredibly dated now.



Q2DM1. Back in the day this was the ultimate duelling multiplayer map and if you've never experienced its multi-layered pleasures then there's one good reason to buy this re-release of an acknowledged classic. But that's about it to be honest, because the first-person shooter has moved on immeasurably since this game, a fact that we were forced to concede after installing this and watching our nostalgia-tinted memories fade away.

Quake III Arena was released more than two years ago now, and if a game was ripe for a £10 release then surely it's that not *Quake II*. For a start people are

still playing it online, and with an active community producing top quality mods you'd feel that you were getting your money's worth. By contrast *Quake II* is an important part of history that doesn't have a place on modern-day PCs at this price, despite the mildly amusing single-player campaign.

If you're desperate to see what the fuss is about then you can probably pick up a copy in a second-hand shop for less, but don't say that we didn't try to warn you.

David Woods

PCZONE VERDICT

57

THIEF II: THE DARK PROJECT

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

VOTED THE sneakiest of sneaky games in our stealth games Supertest, *Thief II* took the same superb gameplay of its predecessor and transferred it into a hugely atmospheric medieval setting, without any messing around with the undead. OK, so there were a few shambling monkey men in the mix, but they were just thrown in to confuse you when you ran into one.

The premise of *Thief II*, as the title would suggest, is to sneak through the shadows nicking stuff, uncovering plots and trying not to get caught. The object of the game is to use stealth and cunning rather than brute force, because brute force isn't very effective, you're not very good at it and it's too damn noisy. There have been rumours on the various *Thief II* fan forums of a player who has completed *Thief II* without ever harming any other character, not even giving them a little bump on



Who goes there?

the head. But that could just be a gaming urban myth.

For less than a fiver *Thief II* really is a steal (Get it? Get it?). A fantastic blend of great stealthy gameplay and intense atmosphere from a series that certainly defined, if not created, a whole genre.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

82

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

If a scavenging panhandler stumbled across leftovers of this quality while up to his elbows in other people's shit, he'd sink to his knees in disbelief and exclaim: "Today, Randolph, you're going to dine like a king." Yes indeed, this month we've a veritable virtual-feast, sure to satisfy even the most discerning of cheapskates. Kicking things off is the Gold Edition of hugely accessible and enjoyable flight-sim *Eurofighter Typhoon* (Rage, £24.99), which bundles together the original game and the mission-packed *Operation Ice Breaker* expansion. Bargain! (83 per cent). Not into avionics? Then how about *1nsane* (Sold Out, £4.99), an entertaining if limited online racer whose manic action will have you giggling with glee like a patronised four-year-old (72 per cent). Also from our friends at Sold Out is *Championship Manager: Season 99/00*, which if you can stomach the outdated stats, is well worth the five notes they're modestly asking for it (80 per cent). Not to be outdone in the battle of the budget game behemoths, Xplosiv throw four past classics (or rather three past classics and *Cricket Captain*) into the fray for a slightly pricier £9.99. Despite its aging looks, *Civilisation: Call To Power* is still a compelling and fiendishly addictive strategy game, ideal if your machine can't handle Sid Meier's most recent *Civ* masterpiece (70 per cent). *Dark Reign*, a real contender for C&C's throne in its day, will again appeal to those with lower end machines, but its overly simple build-and-rush strategies will put most hardened RTS lovers off (63 per cent). *Battle Zone* is definitely worth checking out, if only for nostalgia's sake, as its combination of both strategy and FPS action is a great mix of genres. (70 per cent). Oh yeah, nearly forgot. *Cricket Captain 2001: The Ashes Edition*. Enter your tactics, watch the match. Fun for a week, then forget it (62 per cent).

Martin Korda



Euorfighter Typhoon



1nsane



Championship Manager

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

COUNTER-STRIKE V1.5

■ Free download from www.counter-strike.net | Pub: EA | Dev: The Counter-Strike Team | ETA: Out Now | www.counter-strike.net | Players 2-32

REQUIRES PIII 233, 32Mb RAM, 4Mb 3D card, a 56K modem and the full version of *Half-Life* patched to v1.1.1.0

DESIRES PIII 350, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

ONLINE ONLY

PATCHED

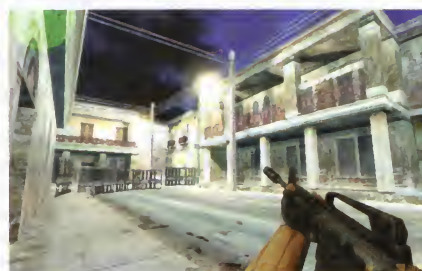
Money for old but constantly updated rope? Paul Presley checks out whether the world's favourite shooter has stood the test of time

IT'S BEEN A while since we last looked at *Counter-Strike*, and as with Class A narcotic junkies going through withdrawal symptoms everywhere, we've been getting a bit twitchy. Version 1.5 is upon us and having cruelly overlooked V1.4 when it popped up to snipe us in the neck last April, had we not covered this one we'd have been in serious danger of losing our status as the *Official Counter-Strike Magazine Of Choice™*. It's bad enough that most of the full-time staff are getting hooked on *Morrowind* as it is.

IR SUCKING

New on the table this time are a couple of extra maps (Piranese, Havana and Chateau, plus an update to Train), various anti-cheating devices, slightly better netcode and a revamped spectator system known as HLTV (Half-Life TV). This last item is particularly nice as it makes switching between viewpoints a breeze, gives you the option to follow specific players (even from a first-person perspective) and check your team's progress from an overhead tactical map of the whole level. You don't even need to be playing the game to enjoy it.

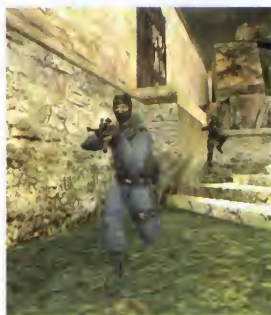
None of which makes me any better at the



Havana provides a moody setting.



The spectator mode adds a new dimension.



Go, go, going.

game. I'm still Lord High Chancellor of Suckville, so if you ever see 'Prezzer' or 'IR Baboon' pop up on a server, say hello and go easy on me. At least the Auto-Director mode offers the perverse satisfaction of seeing just who it was that shot me in the head from more than five miles away, where he was camping, and how well he slaughters the rest of my team. All from a bird's eye perspective.

PCZ_OWZN_J00

Ultimately though, it's just the same old *Counter-Strike*, whether you love it, hate it, or simply just tolerate it. We still maintain it's the most enjoyable online shooter out there right now, but for those who have tried and failed to get into it, only a complete

overhaul of the game's structure will bring about a change of mind. And this isn't it.

The new maps don't really add much to the mix. They're mildly interesting, but they're none too strategic, pandering solely to the rush 'em and crush 'em crowd that sadly seems to be the game's primary audience these days. Terrorists can no longer move hostages all over the shop (a favourite tactic of ours, but then we always were sneaky little cowards), which just adds to the deathmatch feel of modern *Counter-Striking*. The vocal communication options – originally designed to add a tactical element to the game – are now much less demanding on the servers, but current audio technology still means anyone speaking into their headsets sounds like a Neanderthal shouting at you through a pillow.

And that's about it really. *Counter-Strike* as it is, was and ever shall be. The servers are still swamped with *Counter-Strike* veterans that know every inch of every map backwards, inside out and upside down, and the rounds are still all played at such breakneck speed that most of them are over before they even get started. All of which will make newcomers feel as out of place as an air freshener at a LAN party, and that's also the reason why it no longer rates as a total classic. That said though, it's still the most popular game on the net. Go figure.

PCZONE VERDICT

ORIGINAL SCORE	93
PATCHED SCORE	86

Still the best, but not getting any better... or younger

MOBILE FORCES

■ £24.99 | Pub: Rage | Dev: Rage | ETA: Out Now | www.mobileforces.com | Players: 2-16

REQUIRES: PII 450, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES:** PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and an ADSL connection

Cars and shooters don't usually mix but *Mark Hill* discovers that's all about to change

MULTIPLAYER

REMEMBER the beta version of *Counter-Strike* that incorporated vehicles? The idea was quickly abandoned because it just didn't work and was completely at odds with the proper game. Now *Rage* has taken up the challenge and created a multiplayer shooter where cars and armoured vehicles are at the centre of the action. And it ain't bad.

Because of its use of the ever-popular *Unreal Tournament* engine, it would be tempting to dismiss *Mobile Forces* as a *UT* mod, and in many ways that's exactly what it is. But it's also a slick and professional job. The carrying game-modes are variations on standard deathmatch and CTF, while the futuristic environments and weapons have been replaced by

more realistic versions (closer to the *Strike Force* mod than the original *UT*). But it is how much you enjoy whizzing around in an APC running over the opposition while your team-mates gun down the leftovers from the back that will determine if this is for you or not.

While the vehicles do add an extra dimension and the action is for the most part frantic and entertaining, the whole experience is let down somewhat by some poor weapons (the sniper rifle is useless, the rocket launcher too powerful) and some below-average maps. What's more, most people playing on the handful of online servers seem to ignore the vehicles and just treat the whole affair like an FPS, which is rather pointless. There are dozens of mods



Lag can be quite noticeable even on the fastest connections.

that are better in that respect. Ultimately though, it's the chance of blowing up a truckload of enemies with a well-placed rocket as it whizzes by, that makes this worth a go.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 118)	75
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	70
On-Wheel Tournament	

"Most people seem to ignore the vehicles and just treat the whole affair like an FPS"

WWII ONLINE V1.66

■ Monthly fee of \$9.99 (USD) | Pub: Corned Rat Software | Dev: Corned Rat Software | ETA: Out Now | www.wwiionline.com | Players: Unlimited

REQUIRES: PIII 600, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES:** PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D video card and an ADSL connection

Daniel Emery takes a second look at one of the most ambitious but flawed online games of all time

ONLINE ONLY

PATCHED

HISTORY IS replete with disasters: The Titanic. The Hindenburg. The launch of *WWII Online*. To call its initial release a catastrophe would be an understatement. Even the developers admit that the game was several months from being even close to final release before 'da management' ordered it to be shipped out to an unsuspecting public. In the US, sales topped 30,000 before it became apparent the game was near unplayable and an 80Mb

patch was hastily initiated. Not surprisingly, this went down much like the aforementioned Hindenburg, and for a while it looked like *WWII Online* was on the ropes. But somehow, the developers (Corned Rat Software) survived, and a year later they are building up a decent user base. But has it finally lived up to the hype?

The short answer is no. But it's getting close. The original premise of a virtual battlefield encompassing the entire globe

is still a long way off. At present, combat is still restricted to Europe during the Blitzkrieg period of Spring 1940. And although not up to the 'ultra realism levels' that some purists would want, it is lots of fun. Playing in either a land, sea or air role, you can battle it out against either the Allies (Britain and France) or the might of the Axis (currently only Germany). Graphically it's still very much what we saw last year (not too bad for a MMORPG but

nowhere near the likes of *EverQuest* or *Dark Ages Of Camelot*), and the minimum RAM spec is still 256Mb. Ouch. But the arsenal of playable equipment has improved ten fold, incorporating FPS, flight sim and tank-sim genres.

If you've got the inclination, then *WWII Online* is definitely worth a go. It's certainly improved since its launch; technical issues are now the exception, not the norm. The huge choice of equipment means there should be something for everyone, and with a bit of luck, we should have it on next month's cover CD with a free trial offer. Who said war is hell? ☒



WWII Online has come a long way since its release.



Battle across Europe during the 1940 Blitzkrieg.

PCZONE VERDICT

ORIGINAL SCORE	40
PATCHED SCORE	78
Victory snatched from the jaws of defeat	

JACKANORY



Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin...

THE CONTENDERS

HALF-LIFE
ISSUE 71 – 95%



DEUS EX
ISSUE 93 – 94%



PLANESCAPE:
TORMENT
ISSUE 86 – 87%



WARRIOR KINGS
ISSUE 114 – 90%



MAX PAYNE
ISSUE 107 – 90%



GRIM FANDANGO
ISSUE 71 – 90%



THE JURY

PAUL 'YARNING'
PRESLEY



MARK
'PLOTING' HILL



KEITH 'THE
STORY TELLER'
PULLIN



DAVE 'THE
SNITCH' WOODS



MARTIN 'THE
RIDDLER' KORDA



STORY SUPERTEST

It's the oldest and most traditional form of entertainment, but storytelling is still important in a lot of modern games. **Mark Hill** gathers the **ZONE** urchins around him to discuss a tale or two

THE STORY SO FAR

It used to be that only adventure games had any interest in storytelling beyond the most primitive defend-world-from-aliens, save-the-princess, find-the-Whatsit-of-Whatever plots of all other genres. There you'd find proper characters, sizzling dialogue and a story to rival many books and films. But in recent years game creators have realised they can enhance the experience of almost any genre with a well-developed story. And there's no doubting this will become an evermore important ingredient in titles that hope to truly involve the player.

"We need more quality story-writers in the games industry. A good plot can really extend a game's lifespan"

MARTIN KORDA

Dave: Early games, from boardgames to videogames such as *Pac-Man* and the rest, didn't have any story at all. It's only just now getting to be a very important part of gaming.

Paul: We're not there yet. People keep comparing this industry to the film one and saying we're at the silent movie stage. But we're more at the mindless '80s action movie stage. Stories are just there as an excuse for action sequences.

Dave: We keep getting letters from readers saying they'd rather have no story than a bad, clichéd one. If you've seen and heard it all before it devalues the game rather than enhances it.



Do strategy games like *Warrior Kings* even need a story? The jury is still out on that one.



TACTICAL PLOTTING

Mark: Let's start with a genre that isn't normally associated with storytelling. Real-time strategy. On paper, *Warrior Kings* should be a great story. It's written by Jamie Thomson, the co-author of those *Way Of The Tiger* books I keep going on about.

Keith: But *Warrior Kings* is divided up level by level, so you get into the story and then you have to start building your new camp and it all feels a bit disjointed.

Mark: I don't think the RTS genre lends itself to telling a

Martin: Rubbish. I've just spent the last week playing through *Warcraft III*, and above all else, it's the story that keeps you pressing on to the next mission. It's brilliantly written, it's not clichéd, and easily the best thing about the game. Likewise, *Warrior Kings* has a superb story line, but what distinguishes it from *Warcraft III* is that it's branching rather than linear.

Mark: *Warrior Kings* would be a lesser game if it didn't have the story it does.

Keith: It's sort of a parody of World War II, which is quite cool. But the strategy part is

evil path rather than the good one. It actually makes you feel as though what you do in the game effects the grand scheme of things.

Dave: What about the *Commandos* games, though? They don't have a real plot, just missions. And it's no less involving because of that. You play it for the strategy.

Paul: Yeah, I never really cared about the main character in *WK*, or what was going to happen next.

Paul: There's never an emotional involvement in strategy.

Dave: It's like when you're playing chess, it's all about the strategy. You choose white or black, you don't start saying: 'well, the white queen and the black king used to get on really well, but then one day...' You don't need story.

Martin: I think you've missed the point, I think you do need a story, just like with most other genres. Remember we're talking about multi-levelled games here, and worlds full of political intrigue and allegiances

not a board game with a single and very limited playing area.

LIKE THE MOVIES

Mark: *Half-Life* started the whole 'games are like movies' thing.

Keith: As soon as you started you were sucked into it. The intro where you made your way into the compound as you went to work and all the cut-scenes

"If you've seen and heard it all before it devalues the game rather than enhances it"

DAVE WOODS

story. You never really identify with a character when you have a god's eye view of the world. The gameplay is too separate from the story. You get a nice narrative and then you forget it while you start gathering resources and clicking on your soldiers to go here and there.

Keith: *Black & White* does it much better. It should have been in here instead.

Dave: But that isn't a typical RTS. I don't even think an RTS needs a story.

the best thing about the game, not the story.

Paul: I think RTSs can have good stories. Just look at *Homeworld*. The storyline flows through the gameplay, it isn't a separate thing.

Mark: What about the branching elements in *Warrior Kings* though?

Martin: Yeah, your moral choices define which branch of the story you go down. So if you slaughter a village instead of sparing it, you'll go down the



As an action game it's still unsurpassed, but *Half-Life's* story is paper-thin.

seamlessly blended in with the action. You were in the game without even noticing it.

Dave: But there isn't really a story.

Mark: A lot of people confused scripted moments – which did take your breath away – with an actual script. It all boils down to the old aliens-invoke-Earth motif. There's no real characters or dialogue or plot.

Dave: But things like the soldiers turning against you or being captured all kept you totally immersed. It was all put together so well that you were genuinely surprised at some of the things that happened.

Paul: It managed to give the impression of having lots of plot-twists but there was actually very little there.

Martin: Absolutely. For such an immersive plot, it's incredible to think just how linear it really is.

Dave: There's nothing wrong with linearity as long as it's done as brilliantly as it was in *Half-Life*.

Keith: The irony is that the story is supposedly strong enough for all those single-player mods and add-ons to focus on different aspects of it. It's still going on.

Mark: For me it's still the best first-person shooter there is, or maybe ever will be, but people did keep talking about it as being close to a movie. And if you imagine a movie version of *Half-Life* it would be the shallowest, cheesiest action film imaginable. But it was a very big step towards the future. It's hard to imagine *Deus Ex* without it.

Martin: If it wasn't for *HL*, we'd probably still be playing shallow, plotless, corridor-based shooters.

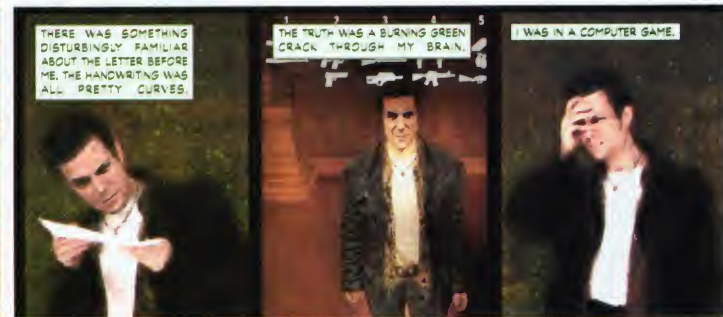
Dave: There is definitely something special about it. Whether we'd think it was rubbish if it came out now, I don't know.

PAYNEFUL NARRATIVES

Mark: Another title that has had everyone talking about the story – good and bad – is *Max Payne*. Personally, I didn't find it too short at all.

Dave: The story is quite admirable, but it is very gruelling. It's just so clichéd. It's good that it's directed at adults though. And without the plot you don't really have a game, just a collection of rooms where you keep doing the same thing.

Martin: I hate the way the story was presented. The cut-scenes were cringingly cheesy, the dialogue strained and the delivery pathetic. The cut-scenes just spoil the whole experience for me. I sincerely hope they meant the whole thing as a bit of a piss-take.



Max Payne does a few things right, but the plot and script are clichéd and risible.

Dave: I think they were trying to be serious.

Martin: That makes it even worse then.

Mark: The developers would like us to think that if it were a film it would be a John Woo/Tarantino affair, when in actual fact it would star Charles Bronson and be directed by Michael Winner.

Paul: But the story was just the comic-book cut-scenes, they weren't really part of the gameplay.

Mark: But you do things like walk into a room, turn the TV on and just happen to catch a news bulletin about yourself.

Dave: Just the kind of rubbish you see in Hollywood films.

Mark: Maybe the problem is that a lot of games try to copy Hollywood rather than make up independent, well-crafted plots.

Paul: But they shouldn't be copying any sort of film. This is a totally unique medium and you can't apply movie conventions to it, you have to come up with your own.

Mark: The most important thing about games is that they're interactive.

Paul: And no linear film-type story can be truly interactive.

Dave: We don't necessarily need the best story in the world, just a really immersive one. A lot of great films don't have a real plot. Like *The Virgin Suicides* for example.

Mark: But that's about characters. Games very rarely go beyond cutout stereotypes.

Keith: What about *Memento*? The whole film is based around the question: what's going on? Why can't we have a

game like that?

Mark: *Planescape: Torment* is like that.

Dave: Oh come on...

Mark: It is! Your character is suffering from amnesia and you spend the rest of

someone and give it to someone else.

Keith: And then he gives you an ear. I really needed that, thanks...

Mark: Sounds a bit like a David Lynch film. But it

aren't storytellers, they're interested in game mechanics and technology. With a film you have a script before anything else, while games start with a concept. They come up with a genre they can stick it into,

"The problem is that a lot of games try to copy Hollywood rather than make up independent, well-crafted plots"

MARK HILL

the game trying to figure out who he is and what he's done.

Dave: My problem with *Planescape* is that I played it for ages and I was quite gripped until I snapped out of it after realising I'd just been told to get a fork from

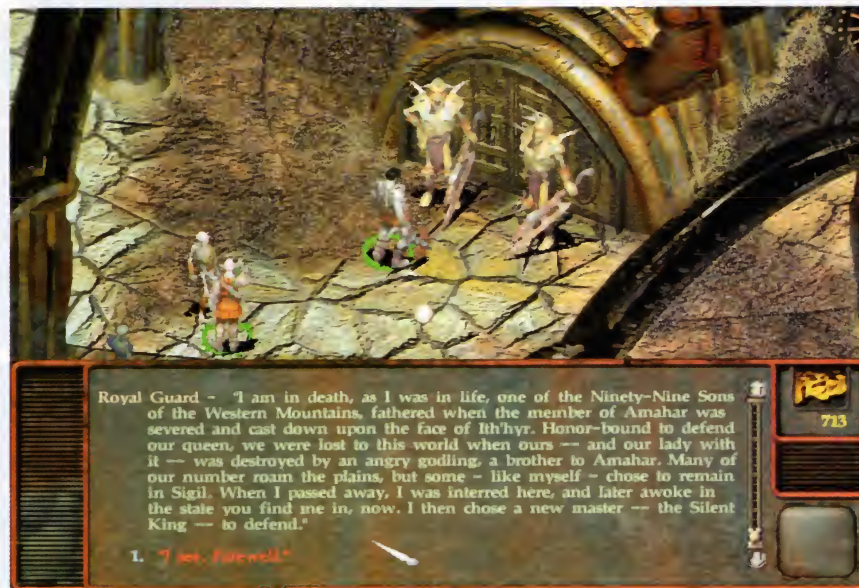
is a fantasy game of the beardy-weirdy variety, you can't escape that.

SCRIPTING

Mark: The problem is that games are created by a big group of people now, rather than one person. And mostly they

then how it will fit inside that genre and then, at some later stage they say: hey, let's stick a story in it.

Martin: You're right, we need more quality story-writers working in the industry. It's such an important element – a good plot can massively lengthen the



You won't find a game with better writing than *Planescape: Torment*.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



THE NEXT STEP FOR STORY-DRIVEN GAMES

It's impossible to predict which games in development will feature strong plots, characters and dialogue. After all, there's no genre called 'Story' and, since everyone working on a title is bound to promise a strong script, excellent acting and an original, in-depth plot, even if it's a footie sim, there's no point making predictions. One game we're sure will deliver though is *Deus Ex 2*. There's still very little known about the story except that it takes place 15 years after the first one and that the total freedom to develop your character will extend to choosing your gender. Ion Storm tells us the level of detail and immersion will be even greater this time, like we said in the chat, it's bound to show the way forward.

lifespan of a game. Unfortunately, more often than not, the plot is simply an afterthought cobbled together with little consideration for originality.

Dave: One day someone will come up with a successful game without categories and all the publishers will say: yes, we want one of those. Look at *Majestic*. EA tried something really brave with that, even if it did lose millions with it.

Mark: Well, it was definitely original but there wasn't a story. It's basically an online game, and story belongs to single-player games.

Dave: But a lot of the newer online games do try to incorporate a story.

Mark: You can't have a story with thousands of characters

just running about.

Paul: It doesn't work. I've played lots of *Anarchy Online*, and there's supposed to be a story in that. This NPC turns up at an appointed time and gives you a quest continuing the story, but you turn up and there's about a thousand people waiting for him.

Dave: That's just because it's implemented badly.

Mark: You can have a main overarching plot like *Star Wars* with Rebels versus Empire, but not personal tales.

Dave: There's still scope for an open-ended storyline. I mean, we're living the biggest story of all: life.

Everyone: (Derisive laughter)

Keith: You could write the story around what people did online. I used to write the newspaper for

"Good dialogue is what takes the player through the emotions of that particular moment in the game"

KEITH PULLIN

an online RPG ages ago, and if, for example, there was an event where everyone was supposed to turn up at a certain time to fight an evil monster and then only one guy turned up, that became the story.

Mark: That's all very valid, but it's no substitute for a real story. All that is just play-acting, where you make it up as you go along. There's no structure or meaning.

Paul: There was a concept floating around ages ago that you can start with a script, the traditional kind that tells the story the author wants to tell, and then implement gameplay elements into it. That's the way to go, with adventure games at least.

Mark: I'd say *Planescape* must have started out as a proper script, or even a novel. It's better written than most fantasy books I've seen, with better characters and a more satisfying story. It's got the advantage of being set in a fully developed universe.

Keith: So much of the game is text, but it creates a brilliant atmosphere, and the dialogue is fantastic.

Mark: You want to read it all, which is rare. You never think: I'll just skip through all the waffle.

TALK TO ME

Paul: Dialogue is important.

Deus Ex has a strong plot, but the dialogue is all clichéd, cheesy sci-fi nonsense. Then you have *Grim Fandango* with dialogue that is as good as any you'll hear.

Keith: Good dialogue is what takes the player through the emotions of that particular moment in the game. Both *Grim* and *Planescape* do that well.

Martin: The classic mistake that developers make is trying to cut corners when it comes to voice acting in games. There's nothing worse than a badly delivered line, it just makes you cringe and spoils the whole feel of the plot. Developers should stop thinking themselves and their mates are budding thespians and leave it to



Deus Ex's story is far from original, but the freedom, depth and immersion more than make up for that.

the pros. I know it costs more, but it's so worth it.

Paul: All these games have really good dialogue and characters, but let's face it, you never find yourself crying over characters.

Keith: There was a point in *Grim* where I came the closest I've ever come to crying in a game.

Mark: Well, in a way, *Planescape: Torment* is a tragedy in the classical sense. It's also very funny at times, but the story of *The Nameless One* is completely tragic.

Paul: Most games are afraid of killing off main characters. If you die you just go back to your last save game.

Dave: But you've got to get attached to them first, which is very hard in a game,

especially in an action one.

Paul: But if you look at a film like *Die Hard*, which is one of the best action movies, nothing happens for the first half hour except the characters being introduced.

Mark: That's one of the best things about *Max Payne*. That you actually play through a memory of him finding his wife and daughter dead, and then play through nightmares. It's all pure cliché, but at least you play through it.

Martin: You need an initial hook to draw you into the characters. Like in *Planescape* the guy wants more than anything else to die, about the only game in history where that happens. And you always find yourself sympathising with him.



The story of the Nameless One is a truly tragic tale.

THE WINNER IS... GRIM FANDANGO



STILL THE BEST AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

We weren't here to decide the best game, but which made the best use of storyline, script and character. In the end we had a hard time deciding. For Keith it was a clear-cut choice of *Grim Fandango*: "The narration is amazing and Glottis just steals the show. It's really, really funny but there are lots of other emotions in there."

But for the rest of us it was much harder to choose between *Grim*, *Planescape* and *Deus Ex*. However, in terms of overall votes for the three categories, *Grim Fandango* just shaded it over *Deus Ex* by seven votes to five, proving that despite modern technology, it's still an old-fashioned adventure game which boasts the best story, characters and script. Never has the old adage, 'They don't make 'em like they used to' been so apt.

Mark: And there's always quite a few choices in the conversations, all of them well written and all of them shaping both your character and how everyone reacts to you.

Paul: And that's the way to implement a story in a game, to make it integral to the gameplay and for everything you do to have consequences in that story.

Keith: *Deus Ex* completely fools

you into thinking it's open-ended. It's actually very linear and all paths end up in the same place where you choose between three endings.

Mark: But there are moments that are up to you. There's a bit where you try and save your brother and I tried a dozen times and decided it was just part of the story that he would die. But apparently you can save him and

have something happen differently later on. And there are lots of moments like that.

Dave: *Deus Ex 2* will be the next milestone. That's probably going to show the way forward.

Paul: You don't think it will suffer from sequelitis?

Mark: Spector's put someone else in charge, precisely so that won't happen.

FUNNY BONES

Keith: But what about *Grim Fandango* for story? It covers years, it's based on Mexican myths, it's extremely funny and the characters are great.

Martin: You really feel for Manny.

Dave: Which is amazing considering he's a skeleton.

Mark: He's just so well voiced.

That slight Mexican accent is fantastic.

Dave: All the acting is good, if it hadn't been it would have been shit.

Martin: Exactly.

Paul: Despite being set in the world of the dead you can really relate to it.

Mark: And it's a love story at the core. I love the bit where Manny is running his own Rick's bar from Casablanca, with a casino at the back and Glottis playing the funniest song ever on the piano. But there are some really annoying puzzles. In a way, the gameplay gets in the way of the story. I kept cheating to see what was next.

Keith: It's years since I've played it though and I still remember it really well. More than *Warrior*

Kings, which is the most recent one I've played. For me *Grim* is the best here for story, script and characters.

Paul: *Deus Ex* comes close though.

Keith: What *Deus Ex* does really well is that even when you're in a bar or a subway shooting

a third-person one you have a defined character, while in a first-person you play as yourself.

Martin: I think it's a mistake to pull the camera out to a third-person view with dialogue choices underneath during some conversations. It spoils the illusion a bit.

Dave: I think, hopefully, we'll look back on it and say it's the one that changed everything,

"The classic mistake that developers make is trying to cut corners when it comes to the voice acting in games"

MARTIN KORDA

people, you still feel as though you're in the story.

Mark: You're always completely immersed in its world. There's so much detail in newspapers and computer terminals that you can choose to read or ignore and the gameworld is just so coherent and fluid. It's all very believable. JC Denton isn't a strong character, but it's done on purpose because it's just meant to be you, with the freedom to be who you want. You actually type in your own name at the start and get told that JC Denton will be your codename from now on.

Dave: It's the difference between first and third-person games. In

that showed the way forward.

Paul: Together with *Planescape* they're the only games where everything you do has real consequences.

Mark: That's why they're a class apart. **EW**



With some of the funniest lines and best characters ever, *Grim Fandango*'s story is as strong as ever.

THE VERDICT

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO PICK WINNERS, BUT WE FORCED THEM TO ANYWAY



PAUL
Deus Ex
Grim Fandango
Deus Ex



MARK
Planescape: Torment
Planescape: Torment
Planescape: Torment



KEITH
Grim Fandango
Grim Fandango
Grim Fandango



DAVE
Deus Ex
Grim Fandango
Deus Ex



MARTIN
Deus Ex
Grim Fandango
Deus Ex

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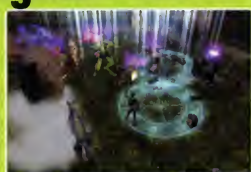


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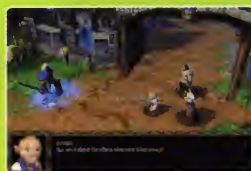
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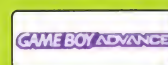
PlayStation 2



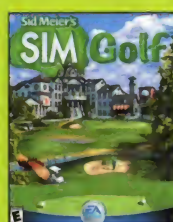
XBox



GameCube

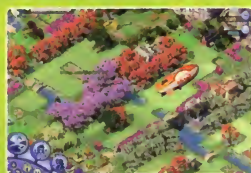


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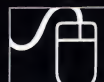
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HARDWARE

AND IT'S
GOODBYE
FROM ME



■ **HARD WIRED** Tim Ponting

▲ All good things come to an end, and my stint as chief techoid on *PC ZONE* is now officially over. Having swapped the glories of the freelance day for a nine-to-five, I'm passing over the reins as of next month to a young upstart who goes by the name of Steve Spence. Coming from the world-renowned Tech Nation website, he's more than qualified to continue the ruthless benchmarking that we've built our reputation on.

I always like to go out with a bang though, and this month we've managed to get hold of the new Parhelia graphics card from Matrox for a rigorous *ZONE* testing. We had an in-depth look at the new technology in last month's issue, and we were expecting fairly big things from the new chipset. It's up against the latest-flavoured GeForce4 card from NVIDIA, the Ti4200 which costs a lot less, and the results are somewhat surprising.

I also couldn't leave without delivering on my promise of a round-up of the latest and greatest joysticks and gamepads. They might not be as exciting as a 3D card that needs a fan just to keep cool, but they are affordable and at least the manufacturers are trying, cramming all sorts of new technology into their creations.

So, thanks for having me. It's been a pleasure and I'm sure you'll give Mr Spence a huge *ZONE* welcome next month. See you around.



NVIDIA TALK A NEW LANGUAGE

NVIDIA introduce a new graphics language to critical acclaim

OVER THE LAST decade, games development has undergone a tremendous change. Gone are the days of specy teens with an unhealthy knowledge of C or VB+++, writing top ten hits in their bedrooms. Since the arrival of the first dedicated cards 3D has become massively complex, and if that wasn't hard enough on the codies already, every new generation of cards brings forth a new set of features and techniques which can make the learning curve pretty steep for even the egghead.

In contrast to other parts of game coding (which is done with a high-level language such as C++), specific parts of any 3D engine, such as the pixel

shaders, have historically been done in assembler. This is a low-level language which is about as easy to read as ancient Sanskrit.

DEVELOPERS GET A NEW TOY

Microsoft has been working on a high-level shader language called HLSL to make shaders more accessible to developers. This is partly in anticipation of the release of DirectX9, which is rumoured to focus strongly on such features. Once the high-level shader is written in HLSL, it is compiled into assembler ready for insertion into the final code. There's one drawback however – being focused on Windows developers, the

compiler can only produce shaders for the Microsoft-specific API Direct3D, leaving OpenGL developers out in the cold. NVIDIA, renowned for their strong developer relations have been working hard over the last year to overcome this 'segregation', and this month announced Cg, or in other words, 'C for graphics'.

Much like HLSL, Cg is a high-level shading language. It's similar in structure and use to HLSL. However unlike the Microsoft offering, a single shader in Cg can be compiled to both OpenGL or Direct3D. By supporting both mainstream APIs, it's hoped developers will rapidly embrace the language and the benefits

will be seen right across the industry. The inclusion of OpenGL will also appeal to cross-platform developers who produce titles based on the API for multiple platforms such as Mac and Linux.

NEXT-GEN, NOW

Once developers get their teeth into this new language they'll find shader writing quicker and easier, and should be able to write more complex, impressive shaders in the same time it used to take them to write substandard ones in assembly. None of this would have been possible with a clunky low-level language, so it's pretty obvious why developers are excited. For the first time they'll have the toolset at their disposal that will let them fully utilise the power of existing GPUs, while also being ready for whatever the likes of ATI's R300 and NVIDIA's NV30 bring to the party in the coming months.

"The biggest revolution in graphics in ten years, and the foundation for the next ten"

KURT AKELEY
CO-FOUNDER, SILICON GRAPHICS



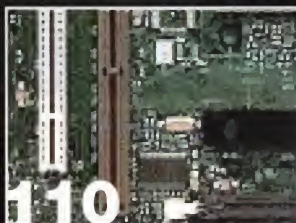
BUT WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN? CHECK THE EFFECTS ON THE BOT. BEAR IN MIND THAT WITH CG YOU CAN NOW CREATE EACH OF THESE WITH JUST ONE LINE OF CODE

1. Smoke Sprites
2. 2D Glare Halo
3. Multiple Bump Shaders
4. Scratch Shader
5. Reflection Shader
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Cg



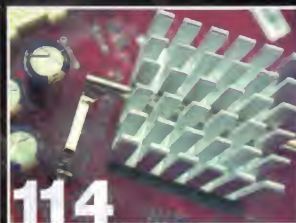
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FEEL THE NFORCE

NVIDIA's new motherboard promises performance and value-for-money



Keep your eyes open for nForce 2 boards.

IN AUGUST last year NVIDIA announced the nForce, its first outing into the motherboard market. Touting itself as offering value for money and gaming performance – without stripping your wallet – it provided the equivalent of a GeForce2 MX, networking capabilities, 5.1 sound, a 56K modem and a rather impressive 128-bit memory bus.

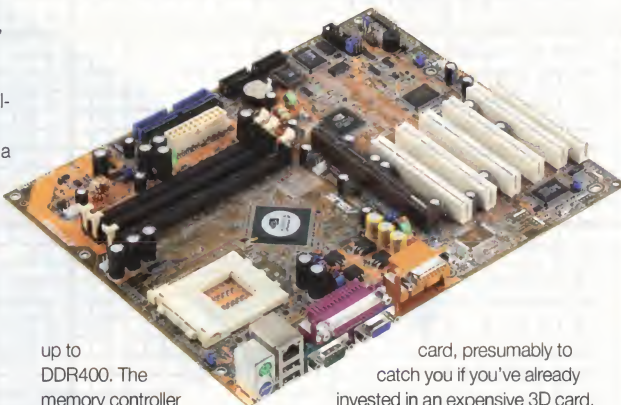
A lot of people were sceptical, ourselves included, but the benchmarks showed the chipset was more than a value 'jack-of-all-trades' – trashing the likes of KT266/A and even giving KT333 a run for its money. As a result it's been sitting pretty as the Best Buy in our Buyer's Guide for some months now.

BACK AND LOOKING BETTER THAN EVER

Guess what? A year later NVIDIA is back with nForce's big brother, nForce2. The specs are very impressive, and NVIDIA has announced two flavours which should be in the shops before the end of the year. If you're thinking of buying a new PC round about then, you should definitely keep your eyes and ears open.

The two nForce 2 boards – named IGP-2 and SPP – both offer AGP8x and memory speeds

up to DDR400. The memory controller of nForce is back with a few key changes, including the introduction of individual 64-bit address ranges for each memory module. The IGP-2 features on-chip GeForce4MX graphics with nView, whereas the SPP is devoid of graphics and will require a separate AGP-based graphics



card, presumably to catch you if you've already invested in an expensive 3D card.

Peripheral support includes USB2.0, high-speed Firewire connectivity, ATA-133, dual 100mbit LAN and 'Soundstorm' – NVIDIA's Dolby 5.1 sound chip.

Dates for retail boards are still a little sketchy at the moment, though with any luck we'll see offerings from the likes of MSI and ASUS before October.

PRICEWATCH

Keep an eye on our charts and you'll never be out of pocket

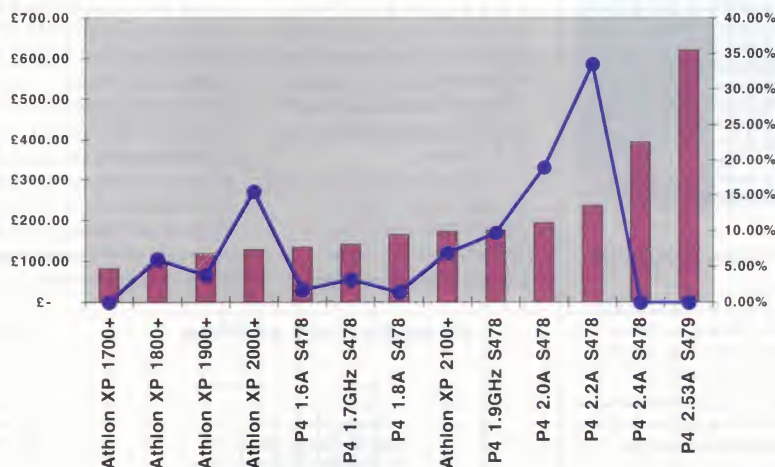
MEMORY

Big drops in price this month for PC133 SDR, as well as the brand new PC2700DDR. Overall memory is still ridiculously cheap and if you've got a bit of spare cash burning a hole in your pocket, get it out now and spend it while you can. Your PC will thank you for it.



Price per 256Mb RAM:
● PC133 SDR
● PC2100 DDR
● PC2700 DDR

PROCESSORS: PRICE AND PERCENTAGE DROP



PROCESSORS

Intel is still passing on pretty radical discounts on its mid-to-upper P4 range, with a whopping third slashed from the price of the Pentium 4 2.2Ghz processor

and a considerable discount on the 2.0Ghz chip. The top end is still remaining solid though, and is likely to remain up there for the foreseeable future. AMD still controls the low ground with its

Athlon processors providing excellent value for money, although the only one offering a decent discount this month is the XP 2000+ with just over £20 taken off its price tag.

SNIPPETS

NEW ATI SHOCKER

By the time this magazine hits the shelves, ATI will have announced their newest mainstream 3D card, codename RV250.

Based on the Radeon 8500 feature set, RV250 is an AGP 4x board sporting a 0.15 micron GPU, four pipelines and full DirectX8.1 support. ATI is aiming the card at the mainstream and hope to take on the likes of Ti4200. Expect a full review next month.

THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL MEDIA?



As if choosing between different formats of MP3 player wasn't difficult enough, this month heralds the arrival of a new type of media called DataPlay. Rather than consisting of existing storage technology, recycled and rebadged as the Next Big Thing™, it's been designed specifically for applications such as digital audio and shows great promise.

Based on 250Mb and 500Mb 'write-once' discs, each about the size of a 10p coin, the manufacturers promise players costing less than most solid-state units, with storage on par with CD-based solutions.

TOTALLY INSPIRED



This month sees the launch of the newest member of Creative's speaker range, the Inspire 2.1 2400. The set consists of two 4.5W satellites and a 12W sub, with very similar styling to the units supplied in the Inspire 5300s. Priced around £39.99, they're probably best suited as an upgrade to bundled two-speaker set-ups, but would also suit the likes of laptops and MP3 players perfectly.

ATI JUMPING THE GUN?

Recent information suggests that DirectX9 won't be released now until late October, which brings ATI's motives for release of R300, touted for late August into question.

We could of course interpret this two ways – either ATI has overcome the problems which have hampered previous product releases, or they know something we don't about NVIDIA's NV30 and feel this is the only way to take the performance crown for a couple of months. Only time will tell.

3D BLASTER 4 TITANIUM 4200

■ Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Price: £179.99 | www.europe.creative.com

Another day. Another Geforce4. Another award

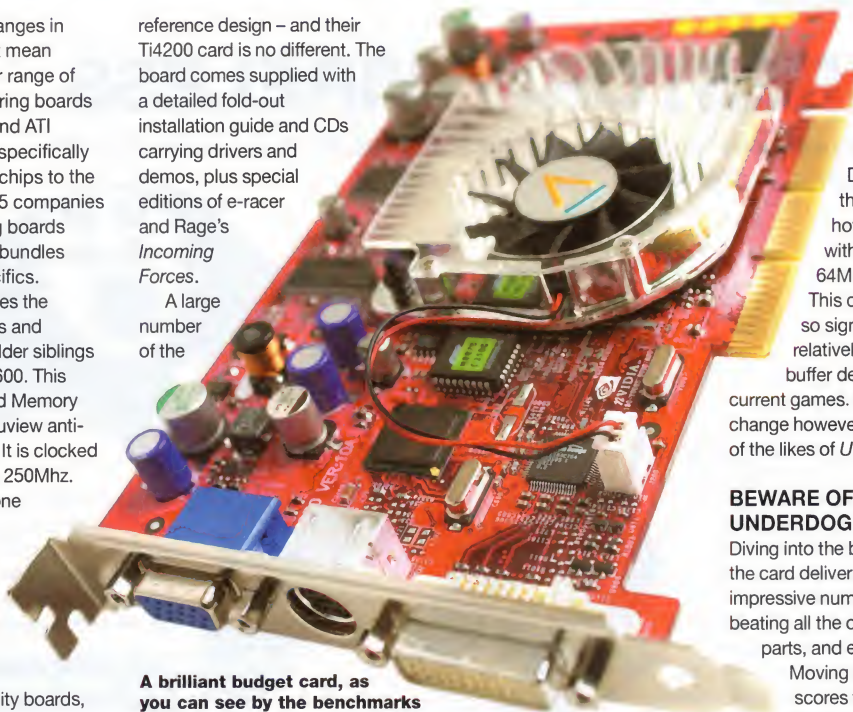
RECENT changes in the 3D card market mean there's now a wider range of manufacturers offering boards based on NVIDIA and ATI GPUs. Geforce4Ti specifically brought three new chips to the party, with nearly 15 companies building and selling boards with wildly varying bundles and on-board specifics.

The Ti4200 carries the same set of features and innovations as its older siblings the Ti4400 and Ti4600. This includes Lightspeed Memory Architecture II, Accuvieu anti-aliasing and nView. It is clocked however, at a lower 250Mhz.

Creative Labs, one of NVIDIA's oldest partners, has produced solid offerings based on their chips since the Riva TNT. Their reputation is one of providing high-quality boards, which adhere closely to the

reference design – and their Ti4200 card is no different. The board comes supplied with a detailed fold-out installation guide and CDs carrying drivers and demos, plus special editions of e-racer and Rage's *Incoming Forces*.

A large number of the



A brilliant budget card, as you can see by the benchmarks on the previous page.

Ti4200s to hit the market recently have sported 128Mb of slower-clocked DDR (446Mhz); the Creative board however comes with the reference 64Mb @ 500Mhz. This difference isn't so significant with the relatively small frame buffer demanded by current games. All that will change however with the arrival of the likes of *UT 2003*.

BEWARE OF THE UNDERDOG

Diving into the benchmarks the card delivers some pretty impressive numbers in 3DMark, beating all the other mainstream parts, and even the Parhelia.

Moving to anti-aliased scores the margins increase slightly at

2x, but even with 4x anti-aliasing enabled the chip holds its own quite well. The fact that a 64Mb card scores so closely to its 128Mb counterparts proves my point well – even the likes of 3DMark don't truly utilise more than 64Mb.

Wolfenstein scores for the card are also very good – although a latecomer Ti4200 is probably NVIDIA's strongest player on the price/performance stakes. In some cases it's so close to Ti4400 that in all but extreme circumstances it would be hard to justify the additional expenditure for the marginally quicker GPU.

Couple the Ti4200 with Creative's high-quality card, and you get a compelling buy for under £200.

PCZONE VERDICT 93

A great GPU and a high-quality card

GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II – DIGITAL EDITION

■ Manufacturer: Hercules | Price: £44.99 | Phone: 020 8665 1881 | www.hercules-uk.com

Hercules updates its budget gaming soundcard with a touch of movie magic

THE Gamesurround Fortissimo II Digital Edition is more of a product refresh for Hercules than an entirely new offering. Based on the highly successful Gamesurround Fortissimo II and almost identical in appearance, the new card bears one obvious change, the inclusion of Dolby Digital 5.1 speaker support. Aside from that the capabilities of the board is on par with its predecessor, right down to utilising the same Cirrus Logic Crystal SoundFusion CS4624 chipset, which delivers above-par audio for its target audience.

Accompanying the card is a special edition of PowerDVD which, when combined with a 5.1 speaker set will allow you to experience your

films in all their digital surround sound glory. Hercules has taken two applications out of the bundle which came with their previous card, namely MusicMatch™ Jukebox and Siren Jukebox Xpress™, having integrated these

features into their new version of the Hercules Mediastation II. Budding musicians will be happy to find an updated version of the composition application Storm™, now version 1.5 as

well as Acid Xpress™ and you get something to play with too, in the form of a Special Edition version of Game Commander 2.

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

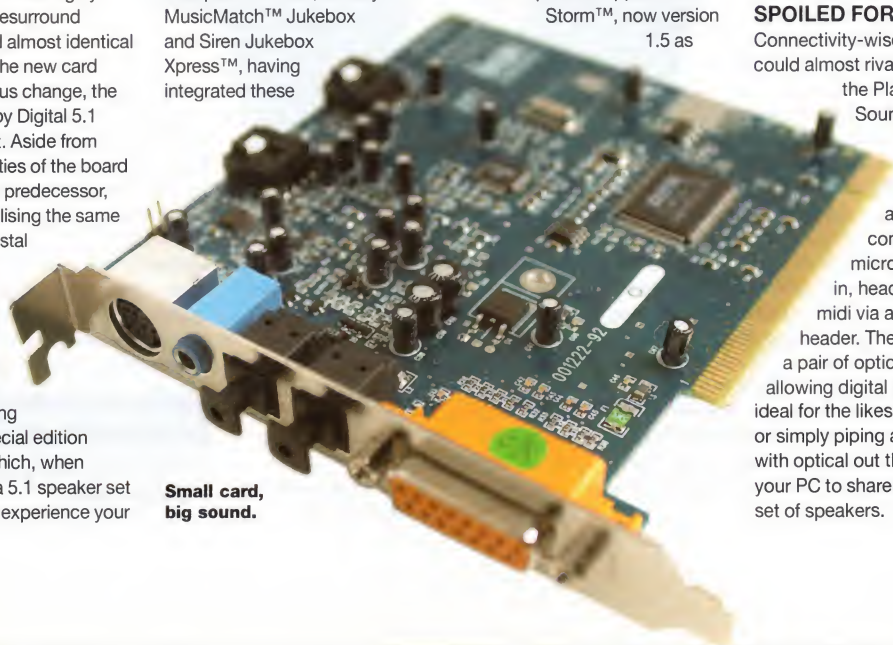
Connectivity-wise the card could almost rival the likes of the Platinum tier Soundblaster cards, with connectivity for 2, 4, 4.1 and 5.1 speaker configurations, microphone, line in, headphones and midi via a connection header. The card also has a pair of optical ports allowing digital input/output, ideal for the likes of MiniDisc or simply piping a console with optical out through your PC to share an existing set of speakers.

Offering up to 52 DirectSound 3D channels, the card handled our *Unreal Tournament* tests with aplomb. Backed with support for EAX 1.0/2.0 and A3D, courtesy of the Sensaura-based 3D positional Audio, this combination offers probably one of the most flexible options for the budget-conscious.

The Gamesurround II Digital Edition is a worthy replacement for its predecessor, and a great buy if you can get your hands on it for anything up to £45. The inclusion of 5.1 support – although not vital at entry level – is a very nice touch and rounds off the package nicely.

PCZONE VERDICT 90

Exceptional bundle and a real bargain



Small card, big sound.

PADDING IT OUT

It's not exactly rocket science, so why doesn't the PC have a single killer pad?

Paul Presley checks out what's around

THERE ARE ONLY really two genres that still make effective use of gamepads on the PC – sports sims and driving games. I say driving games, but naturally I'm referring to the arcade end of the spectrum (*Crazy Taxi*, *The Italian Job* and so on), rather than sims such as *Grand Prix 4*. True petrolheads tend to be even more anally retentive than their flight sim counterparts, and won't go near a PC unless it's got a full-size steering wheel and pedal set-up attached and they're wearing flame- (and woman-) retardant overalls and an overpriced saucepan on their heads.

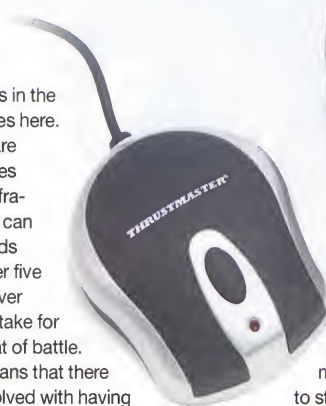
Naturally then PC gamepads need only to fulfil very simple criteria: be comfortable to hold, have all the right buttons in all the right places, and not be painted pink. As certain consoles have shown you don't need trickery, you just need to be practical, but as the following six reviews reveal though, things in the world of PC gaming are never that straightforward...

FIRESTORM WIRELESS

■ Manufacturer: Thrustmaster | Street Price: £29.99 | Phone: 020 8665 1881 | www.thrustmaster.co.uk

This is the wireless version of the Dual Power II, so everything that applies in the review opposite applies here. The only differences are that the rumble features have gone, and the infra-red interface means it can now repulse your hands from a distance of over five metres. Plus the receiver unit is too easy to mistake for your mouse in the heat of battle.

Being infra-red means that there are certain issues involved with having more than one pad active at once, which



means you have to start messing around with tiny jumper switches on each pad

to give them a unique signature. Otherwise it's business as usual and after a slightly tricky set-up the pad works well, offering a cheap route to getting rid of the excess cables on your desktop – which has got to be a good thing.

PCZONE VERDICT **79**

It might be wireless, but it's not the winner

WINGMAN CORDLESS

■ Manufacturer: Logitech | Street Price: £39.99 | Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.com



“Play a FIFA session and after an hour you'll have the wrists of a mountain gorilla”

This is one heavy gamepad. The four batteries crammed into the back probably don't help, but compared to some of the lighter pads, it's like holding a brick. Play a FIFA session with the matches set to ten minutes per half, and after an hour you'll have the wrists of a mountain gorilla.

As far as layout goes it's nicer than most, with only the oddly included throttle control proving to be badly placed for stubby-fingered mutants like myself. The rumble settings are the usual unrealistic vibrating nonsense that always get turned off after being messed about with on the calibration screen, but come with a power boost setting that's strong enough to guarantee A&E wards everywhere will be swamped with an outbreak of fractured tendons and bruised toes (caused when the vibration makes you to drop the thing onto your feet).

On the plus side, the infra-red interface doesn't seem to hinder your input (and you don't have to mess about with any switches). In addition, the discreet receiver unit won't clutter your desk. The six-metre range doesn't suffer from any noticeable response deterioration the further you roam (Anthony was able to crash into *Crazy Taxi*'s walls from the other side of the office – some might even say his playing ability improved by not being able to see the screen).

Setting everything up is easy as pie, even if a lack of real documentation



means the pad's functions aren't explained in any great detail. Mostly though, the Wingman wins because it just feels the most comfortable in the hand (despite the weight) and it sports everything you might want – six buttons on the front, no wires, and rumble effects. Unlike the other pads on test today, there's nothing that immediately jumps out at you as being 'wrong'. Plus if an opponent beats you, it makes a handy weapon for caving his skull in.

PCZONE VERDICT **84**

A real heavyweight champion – quite literally

FIRESTORM DUAL POWER II

■ Manufacturer: Thrustmaster | Street Price: £24.99 |
Phone: 020 8665 1881 | www.thrustmaster.co.uk

If there's one thing a gamepad probably shouldn't do as soon as you pick it up, it's make you want to drop it like a diseased rat. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Thrustmaster Firestorm. I don't know how they've done it, but this is the first joypad in the world that repels your hand as soon as you touch it. I think it's the rubber texture on the handle that's supposed to 'provide maximum comfort'. Instead it feels like the leathery grip of a hated grandparent.

Still, to give it its due, it's a solid pad that's sat as our Best Buy for the past 12 months and aside from the aesthetics,

there's not a great deal wrong with it. You've got two superbly placed triggers and four others that are slightly awkward to find in a hurry, a 'clicky' D-pad that feels just about right (why can't companies just copy the PlayStation pad design and be done with it?), rumble effects and a decent set-up program that lets you start playing without any nonsense. The downer is that it only provides four buttons on the front. Is that enough? Only you can decide.

PCZONE VERDICT 77

Cheap, but not our Best Buy

ELIMINATOR SHOCK

■ Manufacturer: Gravis | Street Price: £59.99 |
Phone: 01732 881500 | www.gravis.com

Easily the best-looking of all the gamepads under discussion, but we're not the type of boys to be easily swayed by a pretty head. What makes the Eliminator Shock stand out are the two 'precision' buttons that fine-tune the analogue stick's responses, ideal for when that touch of extra fine control is needed.

It could have been a mere novelty but it actually makes most games a little easier to control. Unfortunately there are too many negatives with the Eliminator, from really bad trigger positioning (stretchy fingers anyone?) and the limited

number of buttons, to the overly expensive price tag. £60 for a gamepad? You've got to be having a laugh. Plus the D-pad is terrible, being virtually flat and offering almost no tactile feedback to your thumb. Plus, for some reason, there are two little knobs of plastic on the handles that serve no purpose other than to stab your little fingers. Explain please Gravis?

PCZONE VERDICT 61

Oh, the pain of it all

SIDEWINDER GAME PAD USB

■ Manufacturer: Microsoft | Street Price: £19.95 | Phone:
0870 6010100 | www.microsoft.com/uk/sidewinder

They say you shouldn't mess with a classic and they don't come any more classic than the Sidewinder. It's been in service now for umpteen years and still holds its own against the new boys.

True, it no longer looks as cool as it once did. True, it feels pretty weak in the hand. True, its glossy D-pad isn't as comfortable or reaction-friendly as newer pads' analogue sticks. And true, it lacks any kind of novelty function whatsoever... er, why did we like this again?

On the plus side... er, it works. No, that's unfair. It's got the best triggers of any pad here. They hold onto your fingers rather than making you do the work. Plus it doesn't need any messing about with when you install it. True plug and play. Unfortunately, that's about it. A once great pad that's just about had its day. Shame.

PCZONE VERDICT 72

Past its prime

P2000 TILT PAD

■ Manufacturer: Saitek | Street Price: £29.99 |
Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.com

If the future had a gamepad, that gamepad would probably look like the Saitek P2000. It's even got a futuristic serial number-style name – assuming the number 2000 still sounds futuristic.

Unfortunately, while the pad's design might be all techno-looking, clad in silver plating and knobbly plastic moulding, it's also far and away the most unpleasant gamepad I've ever had the misfortune to use. Firstly, it's a snob. The gamepad equivalent of the French. It hates other gamepads and refuses to play along if plugged in with anyone else,

shrugging its shoulders and blowing foul cigarette smoke at them. It's also a pain to install, has an uncomfortable D-Pad/stick layout and a throttle wheel that's hard to reach. You can even lock the stick to one axis, although no one I asked could fathom why. As a final crushing blow, tilt technology has never really taken off and it's easy to see why. It's won awards you know. Christ knows how.

PCZONE VERDICT 49

Morceau de merde

STICK 'EM UP

Paul Presley likes flight sims. Paul Presley reviews joysticks. It's not rocket science

TIME WAS a joystick round-up could include all sorts of criticisms about how well the things respond to your input and how hard they are to get connected. Time was a joystick round-up could include pictures of near-

naked women rating them for 'Phalluscity' and the like. Times, unfortunately, are a-changing.

What we have today are joysticks and gamepads that install themselves the moment Windows XP detects them,

and all respond within milliseconds to your twitching fingers. So it is that these days the only way you can compare and contrast a number of sticks is to test them for comfort, features design and, all-importantly, 'feel'.

So join us as we compare and contrast six of the leading sticks on the market today. And if it'll make you feel a bit better about days gone by, I'll be wearing a bikini as we go. Ready? (Not anymore – Ed.)

PHANTOM 2

■ Manufacturer: Logic 3 | Street Price: £19.99
Phone: 020 8902 2211 | www.logic3.com

Ah, innit sweet? Bereft of anything even approaching a 'feature' (bar the attached throttle stick), the Phantom 2 from Logic 3 looks for all the world like it was designed by your kid brother. In an afternoon. It's the speccy kid sitting on the doorstep of a party, hoping someone will notice his feeble blubbing and let him in. It's the naive thriller reader talking about Tom Clancy novels at an intellectual book club. It's like watching a bespectacled 12-year-old gamely belting out a version of *Imagine* on a 24-hour charity telethon. All lovely and sweet, but he'll never have the vocal range or stage presence of Lennon in his prime. Yes, the Phantom 2 is a slightly embarrassing effort by someone

to make it in a world where they are patently out of their depth. We didn't mean it about the speccy kid, by the way, that was half of our staff circa 1980.

But the brutal facts are that this stick doesn't even have built-in USB support. To do that you first have to fit the supplied adapter. But it does the job. It's cheaper than everything else and the suction pads are bloody strong. Two years ago this would have been a top stick. Not no more.

PCZONE VERDICT 50

Average is as average does



HOTAS COUGAR

■ Manufacturer: Thrustmaster | Street Price: £249.99 | Phone: 020 8665 1881 | www.thrustmaster.co.uk

This is a serious bit of kit. That's what everyone said. "It's a serious bit of kit," said Dave over the phone as he talked me into writing this feature. "We've got a serious bit of kit for you," grinned Anthony as I schlepped into the office one afternoon. "There's a nice hot ass waiting for you," deadpanned Martin, although his wit always did border on the burlesque.

You know you're in trouble with a joystick when it comes with a brass plate welded to the front and takes three of you to lift it out of the box. It's got a separate throttle stick with all manner of dials, knobs and switches. The manual is 184 pages long without foreign translation sections and has chapter headings like 'Logical Programming' and 'Basic Principles'. It starts off with a massive introduction that contains phrases like: "The massively powerful, ruthlessly precise controller you now have in your hands is the proud result of a full two years of dedicated studies and research." You can even download patches from the Cougar World website. Patches. For a joystick. I ask you.

But that's what you want when you fork out a third of your annual salary in order to make your Falcon 4.0 sessions a touch more like being a USAF pilot and a

touch less like being an unwashed, 34-year-old Burger King employee living in your mother's spare room.

The HOTAS, an authentic replica of an F-16 flight controller, is astonishing as far as these things go. I could talk all about the in-depth programming applications that come with the stick. I could talk about the huge online support group for users of the Cougar. I could talk about all manner of technical doobries such as response times and dead zones. But you wouldn't understand them and neither would I.

What you need to know is that if you're into your flight sims in that 'special' way, then there is no finer control device to be using. It's expensive – very expensive – but you'll never feel the same way about this kind of thing again.

PCZONE VERDICT 90

Serious stick for serious money. Tell us if you buy one



CYBORG 3D USB GOLD

■ Manufacturer: Saitek | Street Price: £29.99 | Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.com

Stop reading this nonsense for a minute and go and get your dad. Drag him out of the garden shed and tell him that his long, fruitless search for the joystick of his DIY dreams is finally over. The Cyborg 3D Gold is that joystick.

It's a handyman's dream. It looks like it was built with a Meccano set and it actually comes with its own Allen key! (Ah, the Allen key – surely God's own tool.) You can take it apart and rebuild it as you see fit. Want to adjust the (very comfortable) wrist rest for your smaller than average

hand? Need to change locations of the supporting strut or throttle control because you're a left-hander? It's all good, baby. Plus it's just a damn fine stick to use and the gold and black finish looks real purdy too. Considering the price, probably the best stick here.

PCZONE VERDICT 84

The Golden Joystick



SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2

■ Manufacturer: Microsoft | Street Price: £45 | Phone: 0870 6010100
www.microsoft.com/uk/sidewinder

On a personal note, if you have a copy of issue 96 please turn to page 127. Locate the Sidewinder review and then read it replacing the words 'unnecessary knobbly thing' with the words 'novelty dildo'. The jokes should make more sense.

For those of you without an extensive ZONE archive, I'll reiterate, as nothing's really changed. It's still a fine stick with perhaps the most refined force feedback settings around. It's still the size of Norfolk

and requires its own power supply. It still twitches in your hand thanks to the infrared activation sensors in the handle. But if you've got the cash, there are worse ways to get a thrill.

PCZONE VERDICT 81

Forceful, like a scary uncle



TOP GUN FOX 2 PRO

■ Manufacturer: Thrustmaster | Street Price: £24.99
Phone: 020 8665 1881 | www.thrustmaster.co.uk

I love design. Ostensibly it's the most useless business on the planet as all it does is add unnecessary, expensive and usually unproductive gloss onto an otherwise perfectly fine product. But without it the Top Gun Fox 2 Pro series wouldn't a) look like sex on a stick and b) have a flip-top cover for the fire button which, frankly, ranks up there with the coolest things in the world.

There's no denying that the Top Gun range of sticks live up to their name and could have been derived from the scrotal

glands of Tom Cruise himself (circa 1986 when it was still legal to like the annoying midget). OK, there's a lack of buttons, and those that are there couldn't be more inaccessible if they tried (design again), but when you've something this sexy on your desk, who cares?

PCZONE VERDICT 74

Style over substance



WINGMAN STRIKE FORCE 3D

■ Manufacturer: Logitech | Street Price: £49.99 | Phone: 0207 3090127 | www.logitech.com

The most disconcerting thing about the WingMan is the way it throws a strop whenever you let go of it. It's like a petulant child demanding attention, shaking and wobbling until you grab hold of it once more, satisfying the infra-red sensors in the handle. As side effects go, doing an impression of a possessed peripheral isn't exactly what you want after a long night's gaming session leaves you in your usual paranoid state.

Feature- and performance-wise, the WingMan is pretty much identical to

Microsoft's slightly more comfortable, but more expensive, Sidewinder. So it all comes down to whether you prefer a solid black monster that looks like Satan's own, or this deep blue number with what looks like advanced trigonometry calculations daubed all over it.

PCZONE VERDICT 80

Microsoft lite





DEAR WANDY

It's another sack of computer wretchedness. Can the great Wandy make everyone happy before bedtime?

■ ZONE MEDICO Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type-thing.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Email Address your letters to us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

NO ROOM

Q I currently have two hard disks, one of which I use to store all my Windows system files, and a second, partitioned to 32GB and 8GB. Although I originally felt this was the best way of doing things, I'm starting to find the arrangement hugely annoying as my primary 1GB HDD keeps running out of space and causing things to crash due to lack of virtual memory. I simply cannot afford to format my 32GB disk and reinstall Windows, as it contains too much data that I can't easily backup nor afford to lose! I have an AMD Athlon 1.13GHz, 256MB RAM and am running Windows 98SE. Any ideas on how to solve this?

Daniel Beckley

A To begin with, you need to tell Windows to use your larger, secondary drive for virtual memory rather than the cramped 1GB primary drive. To do this, right-click on the My Computer icon on your desktop and choose Properties from the pop-up menu. Click the Performance tab and then press the Virtual Memory button at the bottom of the dialog. Make sure the second radio button is selected, as this will then allow

you to specify your own VM settings – in particular, which HDD Windows can use. Change the default (normally C:\) to your 32GB drive by picking it from the drop-down list. Then simply reboot. If you want to change partition sizes without affecting data, take a look at PowerQuest's PartitionMagic. While I've used this product for countless years and it's not yet let me down, you must find a way to back up your data. I can't stress enough how important this is, and how lost you'll feel if something goes wrong.

HERCULEAN FEAT

Q I've been searching the web for DirectX drivers compatible with a Hercules Terminator 128/3D GLH graphics card but there just aren't any to be found. Is it just me, or is this card so crap that no one has any software for it? I went to the Hercules website at www.hercules.com but all they could provide were drivers for their newer cards. I got the thing with my PC back in 1998 and nothing has been done to the system since. It's a Pentium II 350MHz with 128MB RAM running Windows 98. I've only got a limited budget, so I can't



Dave Hague has a dinosaur inside his machine.

really go spending hundreds of pounds on a new card. Do you know of any web sites that could help me, or am I going to have to spend money?

Dave Hague

A As you've probably guessed by now, your video hardware is obsolete and unsupported, so it's highly unlikely that you're going to find a suitable set of drivers for the more recent releases of DirectX. A quick search at Google.com reveals us.hercules.com/support/old_driver.php3, a webpage dedicated to drivers for cards designed and manufactured before Guillemot Corporation bought the Hercules brand and assets. Note, however, that the most recent upload was more than three years ago, which should give you some idea of the antique status of your card. A search at www.download.com and www.driverzone.com doesn't help either. The only realistic option is to go and buy a new card, but I must be honest and tell you that on your current setup the price you pay will not reflect the improvement in speed – your old Pentium is going to dilute the experience somewhat. Nevertheless, you can still transport the new card to a better system if and when you upgrade.

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR

Q Please help me! My PC is continually slowing down just loading up simple programs, and I randomly receive blue screen errors – something about an OE error? I find it very difficult to shut the system down or start

it up as it just keeps crashing. Recently my mouse pointer has started spinning and clicking. This usually happens in games but it has also happened on the desktop. This is very annoying when playing *Unreal Tournament* as I keep spinning around in circles and shooting randomly. I have a 1GHz AMD Athlon with 128MB RAM and a SiS 64MB graphics card all running under Windows 98.

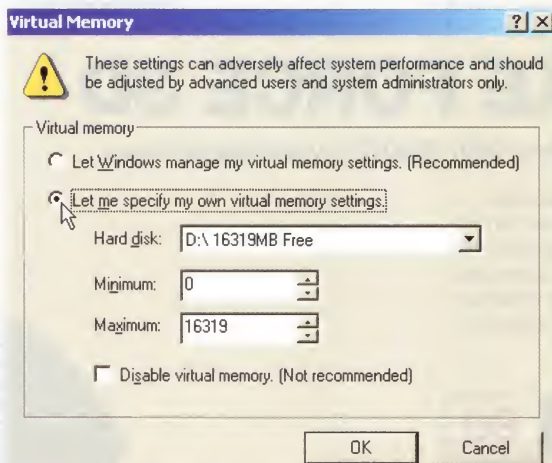
Matthew Childs

A Certainly it sounds like your install of Windows 98 has reached the end of its useful life and should either be reinstalled or replaced. Now, when PCs get sluggish and thrash about trying to do the simplest things, you can go through the rigmarole of defragging your hard drive, cleaning out and reinstalling drivers and the like, but Windows 98 is so bad with its housekeeping that the old problems will just re-occur within weeks. So if you can, get rid of it and upgrade. The random mouse clicking is slightly worrying, as bizarre behaviour like this is often indicative of a virus. Certain Trojans will allow remote machines full access to your PC, and that includes mucking about with the mouse pointer – sometimes locking it from moving at all. Do you have a decent anti-virus program on your machine? These days you need one, especially if you've ever downloaded files from the Internet – I recommend Norton Anti-Virus from www.symantec.com. If you go ahead with either the reinstall or the upgrade make sure you budget for this.

CASTLE WOLFENSLACK

Q I recently acquired a PC after having consoles for about 15 years. I have enjoyed many classic games like *Half-Life* for not very much money,

"I can't stress enough how important it is to find a way to back up your system"



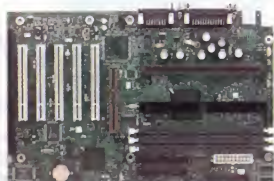
Making Windows 98 use another drive for its virtual memory.

"I had ME previously and had no trouble at all – so why have I suddenly lost my AGP acceleration?"

but new games have run very slowly – for example, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. I have a Pentium PIII 866MHz, 448MB RAM, Windows ME and a 3Dfx Voodoo 4500 PCI graphics card. Do you think it is the fault of my graphics card? Whenever I look at troubleshooting sections they always point the finger that way as it is a) not supported these days, or b) less powerful than having a hamster on a wheel inside my case. Please could you lend me your wisdom and tell me which graphics card would help, but not be slowed down by the rest of the system. Money is not much of an issue as I have found you can get about four good PC games for the price of one mediocre console one.

Piotr

A The hardware you have is not slow – but as you've found out it's not exactly fast either. The processor and video card combination will do you fine for *Half-Life* and its derivatives (*Counter-Strike*, *Team Fortress Classic* and so on) but the moment you try later titles or upping the detail in the old ones, you will start to notice things getting sluggish. The first thing you can check is the video configuration of each game to make sure you are not running things in Software mode. This may seem rather obvious, but I'll guarantee you that there are thousands of people with bad-ass cards stuck in the least effective mode. Now, while the Voodoo4 4500 card isn't state-of-the-art any more, it's by no means a dinosaur and unless you have the urge to spend money, stick with it – it's a good match for your system. That said if you do have some cash to spare, check our Buyer's Guide section for a decent GeForce4 derivative. Right now it's the best card you can buy.



Ain't no way that Shane is going to get a modern AMD processor on an old Intel motherboard.

WHAT MOBO

Q I have a little problem. I'm thinking about getting a new AMD Athlon XP processor. The 1700+ to be precise, and I know my motherboard has to be able to cope with Socket A configuration. The thing is, I don't know anything about my board besides the name. I've searched the Net, but I can't find anything. I'm currently running a Pentium III 450 MHz processor, with 64MB of SDRAM and an over-the-hill Voodoo3 3000 AGP with 16MB of memory, all under Windows 98SE. My motherboard is an Intel Corporation WS440BX AA744110-205. The BIOS identifier is 4W4SB0X0.86A. I hope I supplied the right information for you to help, because it's all just a load of letters and numbers to me.

Shane O'Leary

A You can find a PDF overview of your motherboard at the Intel website. Have a look at www.intel.com/design/motherbd/oem. Suffice it to say that there ain't a snowball's chance in hell of you running a modern AMD chip on it. You'll need to out it – use it as a drinks tray or whatever. In replacing it, go for something like the PC Chips 810LMR board and you'll be able to plant a 1700+ chip on top plus cooler for less than £160 including VAT – not a lot for such a serious piece of kit. As you're upgrading from a lowly 450MHz Pentium, the smile on your face will touch both your ears.

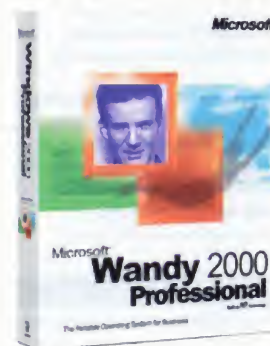
WIN2K NOT OK

Q I recently updated from Windows ME to Windows 2000 Professional as I'd heard and read that Windows 2000 was a better operating system to have. Since then I've been unable to get any games to run! My AGP Nvidia TNT2 card is running in PCI mode, and when the games do run I get what can only be described as jerk-o-vision. I looked at my DirectX 8.1 settings and AGP mode has for whatever reason been disabled. As mentioned I had ME previously and had absolutely no trouble at all – so why have I suddenly lost my AGP acceleration? I have a Creative Sound Blaster 128 and have updated the drivers for that, but could that still be the problem? The sound is stuttering when the games run too, which is why I thought it was that. I have a Gigabyte GA-7IXEH mobo, updated to the very latest drivers and BIOS, and a 1GB Duron. Please help me, I'm a touch pissed off.

Ricky Miller

A I should start out by saying that upgrading to an NT-based OS was a very wise move. It's not going to give you instant extra thrust, as very few things do these days, but it is going to mean a more stable platform long term – and one that won't go into slowmo every three months. As for your problem, I can help. I have an ageing 450MHz Windows 2000 machine here with an nVIDIA TNT2 Ultra card in it that used to exhibit the same problems you describe. To cure it, I first downloaded the latest Detonator XP drivers from www.nvidia.com and copied the installer file somewhere safe. I then uninstalled my existing video drivers and reverted to chunky 640x480 standard VGA mode from the Settings tab of the Display Control Panel. I rebooted, ran

the Detonator installation, and, wonder of wonders, everything starting working as it should. Now, there are two caveats with this. The first is that I've had one system that got totally screwed by using said drivers. If that happens, try using a slightly older Detonator set. Second, I never really got along with TNT2 Ultra, especially as I could always wring higher frame rates out of plain old Voodoo3. Right now the TNT2 is the obvious bottleneck on your system. ☺

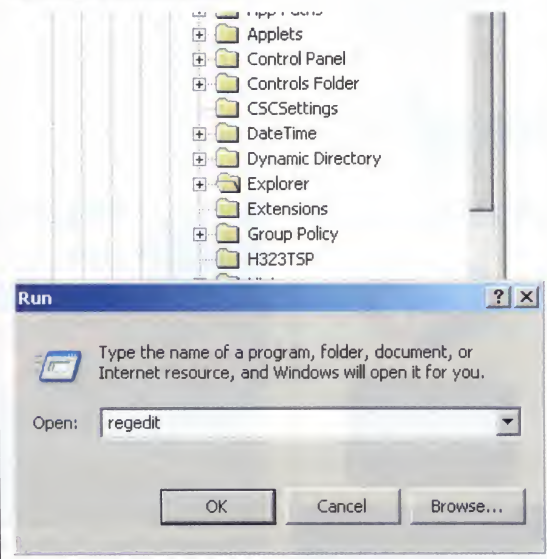


I liked Windows 2000 so much I bought the company.

WANDY'S TOP TIP

CLEANING CRAPPY ICONS

If you've used any version of Windows for extended periods, you'll have found that occasionally its icons get all messed up. Some display as the wrong type and others disappear altogether. You may already use Microsoft's TweakUI utility to rebuild the icons, but that is like locking the stable door after the horse has bolted. What you need is a way to stop Windows screwing them up in the first place. And here's how. First, open up the Registry Editor by clicking the Start button, selecting Run and typing regedit. Browse to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE folder and then to \Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer. On the Edit menu choose New and then select String Value. Call the value Max Cached Icons, and double-click on it to give it a value of 2000. The range for this value is between 100 and 4096, and by default Windows uses 500.





WATCHDOG

Another month, another mailbag of consumer bile spouting about shoddy customer service. God bless ya...

■ WRITING THE WRONGS Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading "Watchdog"

READ ME!

If you are writing into complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

AOL HELL!

It was a lovely promotion, in theory at least. Back in the summer of 2000, AOL came up with a scheme called Sign on a Friend. The idea was that an existing customer sent the addresses of friends who might have been interested in signing up with AOL. These friends then received an AOL disc in the post and if they subsequently did subscribe, then the original punter would get a cheque for £30 for each one.

Andy Crowther did just this and reckons that four of his friends subscribed. However, he only received a cheque for £30: "After many phone calls of being told I had been paid already, or I had been credited with free monthly use of AOL, I finally gave up in May 2001," says Andy. But he still wants to know where his £90 is.

Well, according to AOL, as your enquiry dates back some time, their records do not show any details of the Sign on a Friend offer. "As a goodwill gesture, however, we would be happy to offer Andy a credit of £90 and hope that this is to his satisfaction," said a company spokesperson.

ARE BT BARMY?

A simple question really: "Why can't I change from one BT exchange to another so I can access broadband?" wonders reader Rob Dillinger. "I live in Cheriton and I'm within the 5.5km to get broadband from the main exchange, but I'm

hooked up to the local exchange, which is less than 300 yards from my front door."

He says that he has been to BT's website and it says that they have no plans to upgrade the exchange in the near future. Rob wants to know why. "Do I have to suffer the indignity of 56K in a world where everything is supposed to be getting bigger and faster?"

Come on, BT, what do you have to say for yourself?

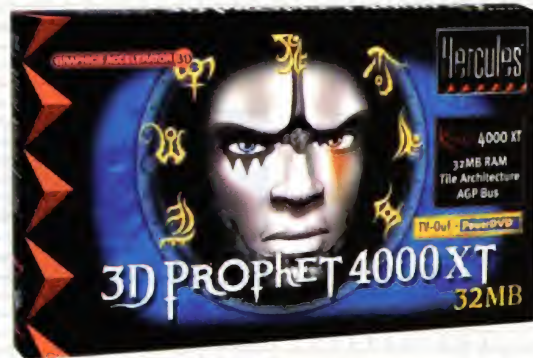
"In brief, it is very costly to move a customer's line from its current exchange to a new exchange. It involves digging up the roads to lay new cables. We do appreciate how frustrating this is for those unable to get ADSL. However, upgrading exchanges for broadband requires a big up-front investment. This is why we are targeting exchanges where we believe that there is sufficient demand."

For punters unable to get broadband at this time, BT says they are exploring a range of solutions. First off is joint funding so that they can share the investment risk. They are also looking into alternative technologies: "We have just started the trial of a broadband satellite solution aimed at consumer and business people, and also have plans to trial a broadband wireless solution later this year."

So, you could be 'broadbanded' soon. Keep your fingers crossed...



If you want a faster Internet connection be prepared for a whole lot of this.



Why does getting a faulty product replaced have to be a Herculean task?

TAKING ON HERCULES

We all know how important a good graphics card is, so we feel sorry for Darren Dooner: "I am at the end of my tether with Hercules over a problem with their 3D Prophet 4000XT 32MB PCI graphics card."

The trouble started when Darren wisely decided to splash out on *Dungeon Siege*. The game arrived and was installed successfully. But, oh dear, lines and flashing triangles began shooting all over the screen. He then had a go with the superb RTS classics *Warrior Kings* and *Z: Steel Soldiers* as well. Uh-oh. Same problem.

Darren says that he tried all sorts of technical checks but none of them worked. So he put a call through to Hercules and was told to do the things that he had already tried. Darren tried them again but still had the same problems.

He then mailed Hercules again and was told to return the card. After various emails and calls, Darren was advised that it could take up to three weeks while Hercules ordered a replacement from France. And that he would need to provide a copy of the original receipt.

The trouble is that Darren doesn't have a copy of the receipt anymore – after all, the card is more than seven months old. "I would expect that as I have been through the hoops with them trying to rectify the fault, that they would send out a replacement by return of post."

First off, Hercules says you will be contacted directly by their technical manager to rectify the problem. As for their subsequent action concerning the return of the card, Hercules explained: "If any customer wishes to return a faulty item to us, we require proof of purchase to prove that the product is still under warranty. All returns are handled through France and take around 7-10 working days to arrive with the customer. The customer has the option of going direct to the retailer if they need a faster replacement."

We do expect though that after your chat with the technical manager, something can be sorted out despite the lack of receipt. Let us know if the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction.

IRATE AT ARIA

It's always a challenge building your own PC, but when things go wrong it can turn into a nightmare, as Oliver Dale found out. He ordered components from Aria Technology, which he put together himself. The system didn't work so he sent back the CPU, the system board, the memory and the graphics card for testing.

Aria found that the motherboard was faulty so they replaced it. They also said that the CPU had a chip on the core, which was why it wasn't working. They believed that the

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"It's always a challenge building your own PC, but when things go wrong it can turn into a nightmare"

damage must have been due to the fact that Oliver put in the CPU incorrectly.

Oliver believes that he didn't damage the chip, even though Aria is adamant he must have. "I feel stuck as to what to do now. My mum thinks we should take them to the small claims court but to be honest that's too much trouble - I'd only do that as a last resort," he says.

Aria provided Watchdog with a detailed breakdown of all the events and on the face of it at least, it does appear that the damage was not their fault. Or at the very least, it's fairly impossible to prove that it was down to them. There was also an issue of the damage being caused by the courier but Oliver signed for the chip without inspecting it thoroughly on delivery.

Summing up, Aria states: "We inspect all of our CPUs before despatch to ensure that there is no damage. Unfortunately, we do find that this particular type of CPU is sometimes damaged during installation of the heatsink/fan unit, and we even include a warning with each processor. The warning tells customers to inspect their CPU upon receipt and to report any damage to us before installation. We know that the processor was not despatched in a damaged state, no report was made by the customer of any damage and when we received it back for testing, it was damaged."

We are not responsible for the damage and cannot be held liable for it."

This stalemate is unfortunate and with all the evidence at hand, Watchdog isn't able to help any further at this stage. Sorry.

DAB-HANDED

Reader Nik Gyle bought an 80 gig hard drive over the Net from Dabs for just under £130. Unfortunately, just over a month later, the hard drive stopped reading data. So Nik took the hard drive to a Dabs store and handed it over to an engineer. "After 40 minutes of waiting, a voice shouted out my name. He told me the drive was faulty and as I'd bought it more than 28 days ago, he was not prepared to replace the item - he was going to send it for testing."

Nik wasn't happy as he was told that it would take a week to replace. He now wants to know why the unit couldn't be replaced there and then.

Dabs got back to us:

"Between the hard drive being bought and reported faulty was a period of well over two months. This was outside the 28-day period during which we automatically replace goods if they are found to be faulty."

Where the 28 days has expired the drive would normally be sent to the manufacturer for repair. According to Dabs though, the company was able to obtain a credit from the distributor and therefore replaced the drive for you. You should have your replacement by now.

In the meantime, Dabs says: "While we are sorry that the faulty drive has inconvenienced Mr Gyle, we hope he understands that our team were merely working within the published procedure to deal with such cases."

In this case, Watchdog believes that Dabs has indeed stuck to its customer commitments. **W**



CPUs - they're such delicate little things...



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Age of Emp. Rise of Rome
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Age of Empires 2
Age of Wonder
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Airport Tycoon
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Allied Assault: M. of Hon.
Alone in the Dark 4
Anno 1602
Arcanum

B = 02
Baldur's G. 2: Sh. of Amn
Baldur's Gate
Black & White
Black & White: Creat. Isle
Blade of Darkness
Brian Lara Cricket
Broken Sword 1
Broken Sword 2

C = 03
C&C: Red Alert
C&C: Red Alert 2
C&C: Red Alert 2 Y's Rev.
C&C: Renegade
C&C: Tiberian Sun
Caesar 3
Casino Tycoon
Champ. Manager 2000
Champ. Manager 2001

Champ. Manager 3
Champ. Manager 97
Champ. Manager 98
Champ. Manager 99
Civilisation 2
Civilisation 3
Codename: Outbreak
Colin McRae Rally
Command & Conquer
Commandos 2
Commandos Behind Lines
Construtor
Cossacks: The Art of War
Cossacks: European Wars
Crimson Skies
Curse of Monkey Island
Cutthroats

D = 04
Delta Force
Delta Force 2
Delta Force: Land Warrior
Desperados
Deus-Ex
Diablo
Diablo 2
Die Hard Nakatomi Plaza
Dirt Track Racing
Doom
Driver
Duke Nukem 3D
Dungeon Keeper
Dungeon Siege

E = 05
Elder Scr. III: Morrowind
Empire Earth

F = 06
FA FLque F'ball Man.'00
FA FLque F'ball Man.'02
FIFA 2000
FIFA 2001
FIFA 2002
Flight Unlimited 2

G = 07
Gangsters
Gangsters 2
Ghost Recon
Grand Theft Auto

Grand Theft Auto 2
Grand Theft Auto 3
GTA: London 1969
Gunman Chronicles

H = 08
Half Life
Half Life: Blue Shift
Half Life: Opposing Force
Harry Potter
Heist
Heroes of M&M III
Hidden & Dangerous
Hitman
Homeworld
Hooligans: Storm Europe

I = 09
I.G.I. (Project)
I.Jones: Infernal Machine
Ice Wind Dale
Int. Cricket Captain

J = 10
Jedi Knight
Jedi Knight 2

K = 11
Longest Journey

L = 12
Master of Olympus
Mar Payne
MDK 2

M = 13
Mech Commander
Mech Commander 2
Medal of Honor: All. Ass.

Metal Fatigue
Metal Gear Solid
Microsoft Train Simulator
Midtown Madness
Midtown Madness 2
Might & Magic 7
Monsters Inc
Morrowind
Moto Racer 3
Motor City Online
Mummy
Myst

N = 14
Need 4 Speed 4
Need 4 Speed 5 Porsche

O = 15
Operation Flashpoint
P = 16

Pharaoh
Populous the Beginning
Project Eden
Project IGI

Q = 17
Quake 3

R = 18
Rainbow Six
Rayman 2
RC Tycoon: C'screw Follies
Red Alert (C&C)
Red Alert 2
Renegade

Return to C. Wolfenstein
Robot Wars
Roller Coaster Tycoon

S = 19
S. Wars: Force Comm.

Settlers 3
Settlers 4
Severance: Blade of Dark.
Shogun: Total War
Sim City 3000
SimCity 2000

Sims
Sims Hot Date
Sims House Party
Sims Livin' It Up
Sims on Holiday

Ski Resort Tycoon
Soldier of Fortune
Soldier of Fortune 2
Spiderman
Spiderman The Movie
Star Trek: Armada
Star Trek: Armada 2
Star Trek: Away Team
Star Trek: Elite Forces
Star Trek: Empires at War
Star Trek: Generations
Star Wars: Battle Naboo
Star Wars: Clone Camps
Star Wars: Gal. B'grounds
Star Wars: Jedi Knight
Star Wars: Jedi Knight 2
Star Wars: Phantom M.
Star Wars: Racer
Star Wars: Rogue Squad.
Star Wars: X-Wing All.
Stronghold
Sudden Strike
Swat 3

T = 20

Theme Hospital
Theme Park Inc

Thief 2: Metal Age
Thief: Dark Project
Tiberian Sun

Tom Clancy's: Rogue Spear
Tomb Raider
Tomb Raider 2
Tomb Raider 3
Tomb Raider 4

Tomb Raider 5
Tony Hawk's 2
Total Annihilation
Traffic Giant
Transport Tycoon

U = 21
Ultimate Soccer Man. 98

W = 23
Wolfenstein 3D
World War 3: Black Gold

Z = 26
Zeus: Master of Olympus
Zoo Tycoon



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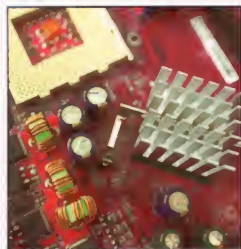
24hr Customer Service: (Freephone) 0800 081 6000

BUYER'S GUIDE

Are you looking to upgrade your PC? Since we've started this Buyer's Guide, prices have dropped consistently every month – and we'll keep on checking to ensure that this guide gives you the most accurate and up-to-date information. While we're on the subject, memory is dirt cheap as well – if you're still labouring with less than 128Mb RAM, buy some now

BEST BUY

MOTHERBOARD



MSI K7N420 PRO

STREET PRICE £102 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A

MANUFACTURER MicroStar International
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

The Asus A7V266-E just gets edged off its well-deserved plinth by a motherboard featuring the NVIDIA nForce 420D chipset. In testing, the board showed superb performance in the crucial OpenGL and DirectX 8.1 tests. It has a number of optional extras, so check with the retailer about what to expect in the box you buy – integrated LAN, additional USB slots, TV out and digital audio out are all available. Bear in mind that if you have an old video card, you may not need a new one with this board – it has a GeForce 2 MX class GPU integrated into the Northbridge... for free! Bit of a bonus...

BEST BUDGET

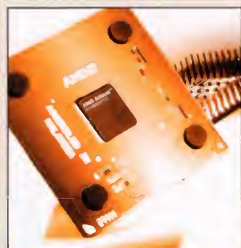


GIGABYTE GA-7VTXH

STREET PRICE £83 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Usurps another great Gigabyte board – this one is a great Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR boards for Athlon. A complete bargain.

PROCESSOR



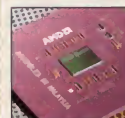
AMD ATHLON XP 1900+

STREET PRICE £118 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A

MANUFACTURER AMD
WEBSITE www.amd.com

The Athlon XP processors are named after the clockspeed of Intel processors it claims to beat. The 1900+ actually runs at a clockspeed of 1.6GHz, and with new so-called QuantiSpeed architecture, more on-chip cache and souped-up 3DNow! instruction set, it offers superb performance in a range of applications – not least games. While the 2100 is currently the fastest processor in the range, the 1900+ is good value for money. Ensure your Socket A motherboard has an updated BIOS and correctly rated components to run an XP processor before you fork out.

WAS £122
NOW £118



DURON 1.3 GHz

STREET PRICE £59
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Durons are basically Athlons with smaller Level 2 (L2) processor caches. This still compares favourably with Intel's ageing Celeron chip cache structure. Besides, Duron still has the blistering Floating Point Unit (FPU) mathematical calculation speed, making it a top processor for gamers.

WAS £63
NOW £59

HARD DRIVE



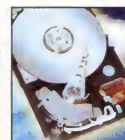
SEAGATE BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB

STREET PRICE £71 inc VAT
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366

MANUFACTURER Seagate
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

We have a new Best Buy hard drive – the 60Gb Seagate Barracuda ATA IV. The IBM Deskstar 75GXP drives are looking a bit long in the tooth alongside this modern beastie. Although it's a 7,200 RPM drive, it runs both cooler and quieter than its peers, which can only be a good thing. Fully loaded with a 2Mb cache, the performance is solid across the board, both in terms of average seek times and sustained data throughput. We recommend the 60Gb drive on the basis that it seems pretty good value for money, though the range also offers 20, 40 and 80Gb variants.

WAS £82
NOW £71



SEAGATE U SERIES 6 40GB

STREET PRICE £55 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, but is replaced in the Buyer's Guide by its own replacement. The U Series 6 drive has much the same spec as the Series 5, but runs quieter and cooler. We've also uprated capacity to 40Gb – great value.

WAS £61
NOW £55

MONITOR



IIYAMA VM PRO 512 22IN

STREET PRICE £633
TELEPHONE 01438 745482

MANUFACTURER iiyama
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Our long-standing Best Buy monitor, the VM Pro 510, is superseded by the 512. Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a rather smaller viewable area than suggested, closer to 20 inches than 22, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048 x 1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. If your video card has the bandwidth, you can rely on this monitor to give you pin-sharp results at 1600 x 1200. There's also the useful inclusion of a four-port USB hub as well as a pair of speakers – even if they do sound a bit tinny.



HANSOL 710P 17IN

STREET PRICE £135 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer, Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it will handle 1024 x 768 with a vertical refresh rate of 85Hz, and 1600 x 1200 at a creditable 75Hz. There's not a lot that'll touch this for the money.

GRAPHICS CARD



VISIONTEK XTASY GEFORCE 4 TI4600

STREET PRICE £323 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A

MANUFACTURER VisionTek
WEBSITE www.visiontek.com/uk

We've now had the first batch of GeForce 4 cards cross the PC ZONE bench, and we have a new high-end winner – though it's gonna cost you an arm and a leg for the time being. Move over GeForce 3 Ti500 – here comes the GeForce 4 Titanium 4600, supplied by VisionTek. The clever memory architecture of the GeForce 4 Titanium processor, coupled with 650MHz DDR memory, gives this card bandwidth fearsome enough to cope with FSAA, as well as high resolutions – at blistering frame-rates. It's faster than Radeon, and faster than GeForce 3. It even blows Xbox out of the water. Price shown is a conversion of the Euro RRP; no street price is available yet.



VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!XS 32MB

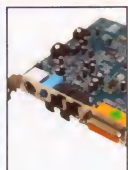
STREET PRICE £71 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488
WEBSITE www.videologic.com

The new Kyro II chipset blows its slower Kyro brethren to smithereens at 175MHz clockspeed. The 32Mb Vivid!XS replaces the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 as Best Budget Buy – but only just, there's barely anything to choose between the two.

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◀ BEST BUDGET



HERCULES GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DE

STREET PRICE £45 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8686 5600
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

Hercules has just updated its fantastic Gamesurround Fortissimo II card to incorporate support for 5:1 sound, which merely cements its position as best budget buy. All other features stay the same.



MICROSOFT GAMEVOICE USB

STREET PRICE £34 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

So how can a set of budget headphones cost almost as much as our Best Buy? Simple – the GameVoice enables you to talk to your mates over the Internet. It works very well, and as they double as a more than decent set of headphones, they're a bit of a bargain.



YAMAHA CRW3200E-VK

STREET PRICE £88
MANUFACTURER Yamaha
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.yamaha-it.de

Yamaha has been making great CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the company's current range-topper. We love its AudioMaster burning mode for high-quality audio CD burning. You will too. A veritable bargain.



SAITEK CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both strong and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for – and its response and accuracy can only be described as unequalled.



SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY

STREET PRICE £19.99
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder/

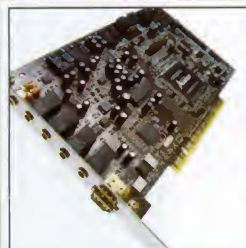
Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play Gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle Sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear.



HERCULES XPS210

STREET PRICE £40 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8686 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving a decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue, it looks the part too...



CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLAYER

STREET PRICE £79 inc VAT
TELEPHONE N/A
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

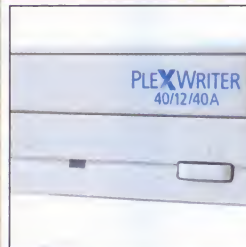
The SonicFury gets pipped to the post by the excellent new Audigy Player from Creative Labs. Successor to the very successful Sound Blaster Live! series, the Audigy has an audio engine four times as powerful, excellent audio quality, and a range of features that makes it the most versatile all-round gaming/music/DVD soundcard. EAX Advanced HD adds a range of new 3D audio features, though it'll be a while before games filter through with support for the more esoteric options. It's about £20 more expensive than its main competition, but we reckon it's well worth it.



SENNHEISER HD 200 MASTER

STREET PRICE £45
TELEPHONE 01494 551 551
MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

This German audio company has been around for more than 50 years, and was founded by the suitably Teutonic-sounding Dr Fritz Sennheiser. The HD 200s are actually targeted at DJs, and for very good reason. They're very, very loud and they're also very, very strong. They feature a closed back design, which means you can hear nearby rocket jumpers quite comfortably. And, crucially for those extended gaming sessions, they're comfortable and light, weighing in at around 140g. A great pair of cans at a top price – well, what are you waiting for?



PLEXTOR PX-W4012TA

STREET PRICE £108
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522
MANUFACTURER Plextor
WEBSITE www.plextor.com

Plextor once again take top honours with a superfast 40x Write, 12x ReWrite and 40x Read drive. No matter what task you throw at it, it simply zips along, and BURN-Proof technology stops buffer underruns (where the data flow from the burner's cache to the burner is interrupted) from rendering the drive a coffee placemat machine. Particularly nifty is its PowerRec II technology which analyses the quality of the blank media being used and adjusts the write speed downwards if necessary. All in all, we reckon this is the best drive out there – and it's shipped with Nero 5, another major bonus.



HOTUS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249 inc VAT
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Have we finally snapped? Have almost ten years of producing the finest magazine known to man finally taken its toll? £249.99 for a joystick? Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, with a manual that must have taken a year to research and quality materials throughout, including the independent throttle stick. For those who have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane, if you're strong enough to lift it out of the box. Everyone else should avert their eyes and buy the Saitek Cyborg Gold instead. Or a diamond necklace or some other really expensive thing.



WINGMAN CORDLESS

STREET PRICE £40
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The PC might not have a single killer gamepad in its locker (for Christ's sake why doesn't somebody just copy the PS2 design) but this is the closest yet. The infra-red interface doesn't seem to hinder your input, and the discreet receiver unit won't clutter your desk unnecessarily. Plus the six-metre range doesn't suffer from any noticeable response deterioration the further you roam. Setting everything up is easy as pie, even if a lack of real documentation means the pad's functions aren't explained in any great detail. Comfortable to use, plenty of buttons and a complete lack of cables make this the best buy, but only by a short distance.



KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 4.1

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Klipsch
TELEPHONE 0031 314 383 699
WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Take your pick for Best Buy between the stunning Klipsch 4.1 THX-approved speakers and the cheaper long-term favourites Sirocco Crossfire from Videologic. Both represent great value for money, but the Klipsch edges it in the listenability stakes, hence their new entry here. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers that can split your ears just as well as the Crossfires. You'll find no better speaker set-up for watching DVDs and playing games on PC. Your neighbours will love it.

SOUND CARDS

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GUIDING LIGHT



GIRL GUIDE Rhianna Pratchett

▲ You might have spent the Jubilee bank holiday weekend relaxing in the sun or taking in the festivities surrounding the half-century celebrations of our dear queen. I however spent it in a darkened study in North London in front of *Neverwinter Nights*, until I dragged myself to work on Wednesday morning mumbling incoherently about familiars and fireballs.

You'd think after writing nine pages of previews and reviews on the game that I'd be sick of it by now. But no, I'm dedicated to you people, which is why you'll find my guide to creating levels with the *Neverwinter Nights* fantastic Aurora toolset on page 120. Meanwhile, on these very pages here we have some damn fine Extended Play loveliness for you, including toolsets for *Jedi Knight II*, *Neverwinter Nights*, *Aliens Vs Predator 2* and *Dungeon Siege*, the latest update for *Half-Life* and some great full conversion mods for *MechWarrior 4* and *Quake III*.

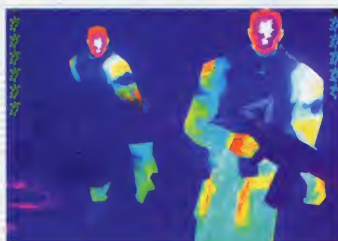
Forget the future though, back in 1987 David Braben and Ian Bell's *Elite* changed the face of space gaming forever. Richie Shoemaker remembers it fondly in Games that Changed the World, which you'll find on page 142. It's a love thing, really.

Feel the fear

ON THE CD/DVD In AvP2 no one can hear you mod
■ www.planetavp.com



Weapon damage has been tweaked to perfection in the 1.0.9.6 update.



"We're all gonna die!"

NEVER HAVE two such lethal killing machines from the big screen been merged so harmoniously into a computer game – as the trout-faced Milli Vanilli lookalike of the Predator, and the acid-for-blood 'I'll bite your head like a creme egg' Alien in the *Alien Vs Predator* games. The first incarnation may have been terrifying and its successor even more so, but sometimes there's a whole lot of fun to be had in scaring yourself. Certainly that's what the AvP2 modding



Skins and taunts – all on our cover disc.



community think, judging by the flurry of mods and skins that have appeared since the release of the official editing tools, which we included in our issue 106 discs.

If you didn't get your mitts on them back then, you've now got another chance – we've got the full tools, plus the updated tool set this month. In order to give you a little inspiration, we've also included a couple of great skins from Quovadis. So check out the predalien skin, which is based on the original concept art for AvP2 and the marauder battleloader.

Finally if you'd prefer to get on with the business of playing the original game rather than getting your hands dirty messing around with code, then peel the sellotape off our cover discs and get yourself the latest AvP2 1.0.9.6 update patch. The tweaks to this patch mostly centre around weapon damage, taunts and re-spawning. For an up-to-date list of the latest mods, skins, maps and patches for all the AvP games, make sure you keep www.planetavp.com on your Favourites list. Go forth and mod, people.

CHEATS AHoy!

The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking on our cover discs. Because you can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under Cheatstation in the Extended Play section of the DVD. This month we're bringing you handy hints for *Neverwinter Nights*, cheeky cheats for *Imperium Galactica*

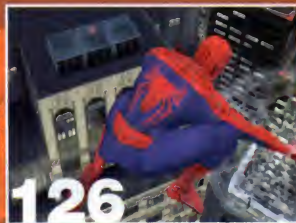
II, a bunch of life-enhancing rule-benders for *The Sims: Hot Date*, ideas to make life on Mars easier in *Red Faction*, killer short cuts in *Hitman: Codename 47*, ways to make victory a formality in *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns* and devious methods to make your domain the most devilish of them all in *Dungeon Keeper 2*. Don't feel too guilty, we all do it.



120 THE GUIDE
Neverwinter Nights level design



124 THE MODSQUAD
Parkas at the ready...



126 DISC PAGES
Check out the latest demos



130 FIGHT CLUB
Come and 'ave a go...

Ready for Ricochet?

Half-Life gets a few nips and tucks and a whole new mod

■ www.planethalf-life.com/half-life

ON THE DVD **THE LATEST** release from Valve knocks your *Half-Life* version up a notch and introduces a new mod, *Ricochet*. In terms of changes to core gameplay, the update doesn't do all that much. Aside from a number of smaller fixes, plus additions to the way servers log and ban cheats, there's not a lot new to try out in the way of weapons, maps or physics. But read on.

What may get your blood pumping is the new mod, *Ricochet*. Like *Team Fortress Classic* and *Deathmatch Classic*, it comes free with every *Half-Life* install and you can either take it or leave it. Best described as *Quake* meets *Tron*, the idea is simply to stay alive, leaping between floating discs and knocking opponents off by firing discs at them. Power-ups increase the number and lethality of your discs. Here's a tip: once you understand that you can't shoot people above or below you, the game becomes magically easier. Lots of fun.



Valve's trippy new *Ricochet* mod will stretch your reflexes. Don't fall off now!

Dungeon Siege

■ www.dungeonsiege.com/index.shtml/

ON THE DVD **WITH ITS** detailed and atmospheric level design, the graphical beauty of the epic RPG *Dungeon Siege* has captured many a gamer's heart. The release of the first beta version of the *Dungeon Siege* editor will allow you to recreate almost every aspect of the game. As well as other cool stuff such as 1,200 objects to create your environments from, you will also be able to design the lighting, sound and special effects used in each level. If you're feeling even more ambitious, you'll be able to script your own encounters and battles with both monsters and NPCs. There's even the option to play director and create your own in-game movies.



Can you make your level look this good?

Morrowind

■ www.morrowind.com
■ www.rpgplanet.com/morrowind

ON THE DVD **WHEN YOU'RE** dealing with a game as epic and time-consuming as *Morrowind*, everyone has their own opinions about where they'd like to see tweaks in the gameplay. Which is where the wonderful world of plug-ins comes in. Plug-ins can change anything from the wording on signs or the amount of money merchants have, right through to adding whole new quests. We've included four official plug-ins this month: the Helm of Tohan, the Area Effect arrows, Bitter Coast sounds and The Entertainers. If you want to get the latest fan-made plug-ins, then check out www.rpgplanet.com/morrowind for the latest releases from the *Morrowind* community.

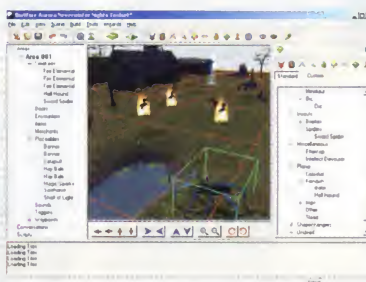


Add whole new quests to *Morrowind*.

Neverwinter Nights

■ www.neverwinter nights.com

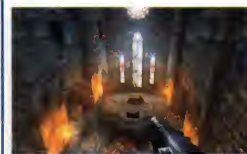
ON THE DVD **IF YOU'RE** interested in experimenting with the latest in game editing tools, check out Bioware's beta release of their Aurora toolset from *Neverwinter Nights*, which you can find exclusively on our DVD. This beta contains many of the features of the full toolset (see my guide on page 120 for more info) and as well as allowing would-be builders the chance to see how *Neverwinter Nights* was created, it also allows you to experiment with level building, monster creation and scripting. Unfortunately you won't be able to play through the levels you create in this beta, but Bioware are hoping to produce a utility that will allow you to do so in the future.



See how *NWN* was created.

SHORTS

EXTRA WOLF



ON THE DVD An essential download this month for all *Wolfenstein* fans is the *RTCW* Game Of The Year Map Pack which contains seven new official maps not in the retail version. You'll need to patch up your copy of *RTCW* to the version 1.33 patch, but lucky you, because we've also included that along with the map pack on this month's discs.

ONCE WERE WARRIORS



ON THE DVD Sometimes there's nothing like stomping around in a mean robotic machine. But if you're feeling a bit lonesome, get hold of the *MechWarrior 4* co-op mod, which allows you and five other players to play through 19 single-player missions as lance mates. You'll need both *MW4: Vengeance* and the *Black Knight* add-on to play this mod.

KNIGHT MOVES



ON THE DVD We've even more *Jedi Knight II* goodness for you this month with the updated *JKII* toolset and two map packs. The first is *Ente's* pad pack which contains four duel maps: Padhall, Padhanger, Padtemple and Padreactor. The second is the *IRC* map pack, which has three maps (based on the *Coruscant* battles) that can be played in either *FFA* or duel mode.

FAST REACTIONS



ON THE DVD Imagine the gameplay of *Action Quake II* played through *Quake III*: *Arena's* superior rendering engine... *Reaction Quake III* is a community-based, full conversion mod aiming to simulate the feel of *Action Quake II* in a *Quake III* environment.

THE GUIDE: HOW TO CREATE LEVELS FOR... NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The game's a classic but we know you can do better. *Rhianna Pratchett* shows you how



ON THE DVD The *Neverwinter Nights* toolset ships with the game but you can also find it on this month's DVD, or from www.neverwinter nights.com. You can use it to create your own level, but won't be able to play it without the full game.

THE NUMBER of games shipping with official toolsets has soared noticeably over the last few years, which goes to show that what gamers want out of a game is no longer just the single-player and multiplayer but the added extras as well. It's a two-way street though – as well as providing more for your money, developers realise that it's the best way to ensure ongoing sales with minimal output on their part.

Traditionally, fan-made mods and maps have been solely the preserve of the FPS and RTS but role-playing games are starting to get in on the act: *Dungeon Siege*, *Morrowind* and most recently *Neverwinter Nights* have all been released with sophisticated editors, and fans are already swamping the Internet with their creations.

With *Neverwinter Nights*, Bioware has taken it one stage further by designing the building blocks of the game around the idea of creating an easy to use toolset in which players can build both quick and easily accessible levels, as well as more complex in-depth ones. It's even possible to 'unlock' chapter one of the game in the toolset to see how it was created. So read on, and we'll show you how to create a basic level, adding features and monsters until you've got a complete *NWN* scenario.

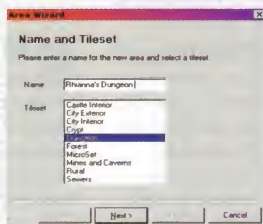
OUR STORY STARTS HERE

You can start the toolset from either the *Neverwinter Nights* start menu, which appears when you first load up the game or by launching *nwtoolset.exe* in the game's main directory. The first thing you see when you open the toolset is the module creation wizard.

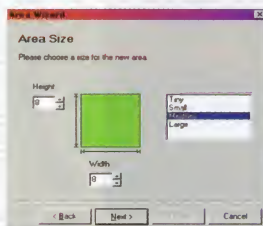


My idea of the perfect holiday destination: very hot and very dark.

Select Next and enter the name of your module. Click Next again, this will take you to the Area Creation screen. Select the Area Wizard and then type in the name of your area and select the area type. For this guide, I have used the Dungeon Tile set but there's nothing stopping you from selecting whatever you want.



Click Next again, which takes you to the sizing screen, where you can adjust the size of the area up to 32x32. For my level I've used a 12x12 area size. Click next again and make sure that Open Area In Area Viewer is selected and click Finish, Next and Finish again and you have the bare bones of your level.



GET TO KNOW YOUR TOOLS

The image below shows your toolset interface, which contains everything you need to create a basic level. It's divided into four main sections.

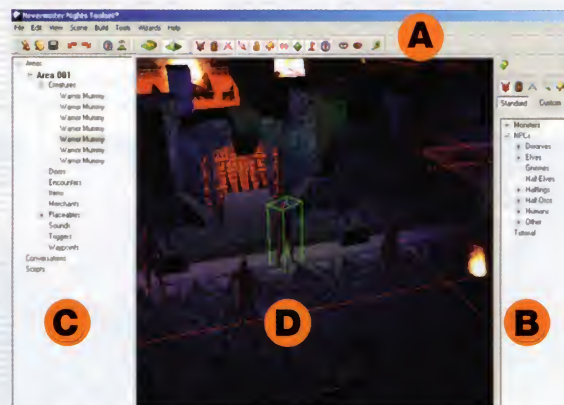
A. The Tool bar: Your main command list where you can switch the level details on and off, such as sound, lighting and shadows and see specific features, like monsters and encounters, at a glance.

B. The Palette: This is where you select the elements of your level. Each tile set has a number of specific standard elements listed under features, groups and terrain, which have been put together by Bioware to help you create something that looks half decent. So if you're using the

dungeon tiles, you'll get things such as lava, pillars and corpses. There is also a custom list where you can add features of your own design.

C. The Content List: An organised list of the various features in your level, which automatically updates as you go along.

D. The Display Area: This is the area where you'll be doing most of your work. Use the buttons below or your mouse wheel to zoom in and out or rotate the level so you can see what it will look like from all angles. Make sure you check this thoroughly as you go through, although this is no substitute for playing through a level from start to finish. Things always look different when you're actually in the game.



The *Neverwinter Nights* toolset interface.



Things can look very different when you're actually playing through the level.

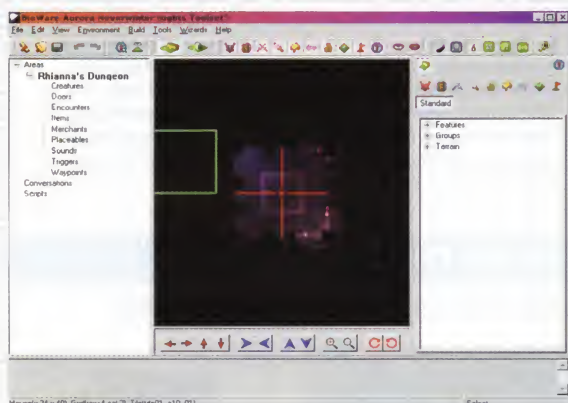
"Don't automatically assume all players will play through the level in the same way"

TIPS FROM BOWARE...

AMMO AND RESTING POINTS

Characters that use missile weapons go through a lot of ammunition very quickly so they need to have easy access to a store that has ammunition or the level designer will have to place a lot of ammunition around. An archer who has to resort to using a melee weapon that he's probably not trained in using, is not going to have a lot of fun. Don't forget about thrown missile weapons like darts, shuriken and axes.

Unless the player is given numerous healing potions and is not a spell caster, you will need to place safe areas where the player can rest without worrying about being attacked. If you don't want them to be able to rest within the dungeon level, allow them an easy exit or place a side area that is safe within the dungeon for them to rest.



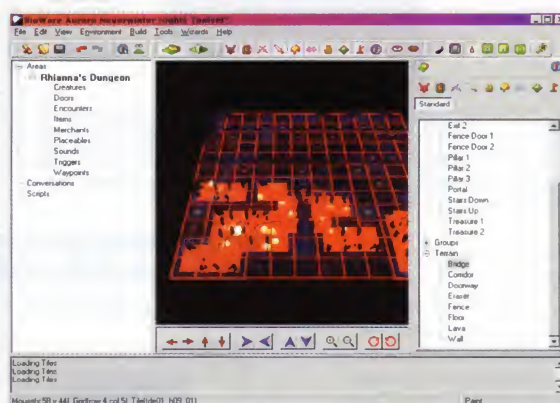
Remember to set the start point for your level.

READY TO GO

The first thing you'll see is the starting area, which will be directly in the middle of the level. You'll probably need to change this to suit the contents of your level, otherwise you might find you've dropped straight into a pool of lava when you start. Use the Paint Start Area (blue circle

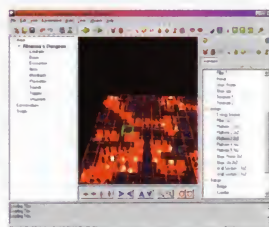
icon) button in the palette to set a new starting point.

Now you need to start adding floor, which you'll find in the terrain list under the paint terrain (green and yellow icon) button in the palette. If you're not sure how you want the level to look you might want to try filling the whole area with floor to give you



Filling in all the floor tiles first helps give you a better sense of perspective on your level.

a better idea of the space you're working in, and then add other elements such as lava on top of it. Right click on the green box that appears around a tile to rotate it before you place it.

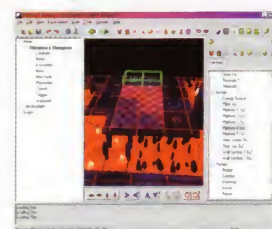


Adding in the floor can give you a better idea of space.

Bear in mind where you're intending players to enter the level and what paths you envisage them taking. Don't automatically assume that all players will play through the level in the same way, try and create several key areas around the level. Remember to add bridges

over inaccessible tiles such as lava. After you've finished laying the floor, you can start adding a few interesting features. In the groups section of the palette you'll find objects that usually occupy more than one tile such as platforms, stairs and wall sections and in the features section you have small items such as portals, treasure and chests.

You can add even more details by clicking on the paint placeable objects (table icon) and paint sound objects (speaker icon) buttons in the palette. With these two tools you can decorate your level with special effects such as flames and dust plumes, or have noises like dripping water in certain areas. Check out the buttons on the right side of the toolbar, they allow you to add general features like ambient sound and lighting to your level.



These chessboard tiles create a good focus area for your level.

BRING 'EM ON

So you've got your level mapped out and now you need a bit of life in there. You've got several options when it comes to monster creation. These include: 1) Pre-built monsters that you just drop into the level in a specific place; 2) Monsters you create yourself using the Monster Wizard tool in the Wizard section of the toolbar and 3) Monsters that appear when players cross certain trigger areas, which are known as encounters.

MONSTER SQUAD

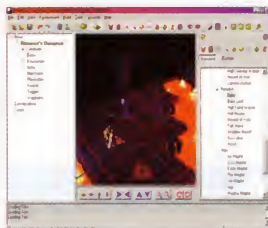
To drop random creatures into your level click on the paint creature (red demon) button on your palette. Click on monsters, which brings up a list of all available types. Left click on the one you want to drop and then move your mouse pointer (which should have turned into a paintbrush) to the place you want to drop it and left click again. Think about how hard or easy you want it to be. Don't do what I did and go straight for the flashiest looking monsters if you

TIPS FROM BOWARE

"PLAY THE LEVEL"

The most important thing to do when you are making a level whether you intend to DM players through it or not, is to play it. Put aside the fact that you know exactly what is going to happen, start up a character and play through your level. Try to imagine the different ways that a player might react as they enter a room for the first time or see a new monster. Play as a slow and methodical character that kills every single monster and opens every single chest. Do they gain too much experience? Too much treasure? Play as an impatient character that rushes through the level. Is it too hard? Do they get enough of a reward on the critical path of the level?

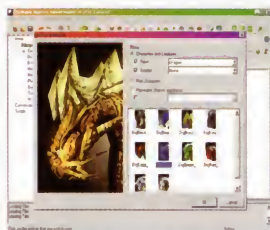
want your level to be suitable for lower level characters, otherwise you'll end up kissing tiles pretty quickly or running round the level with every creature chasing you like an RPG Benny Hill sketch.



Placing creatures in your level is very simple just don't get carried away.

MAKE YOUR OWN

To customise your own monster, click on the wizards menu in the toolbar and select Creature Wizard (this is also the same way you go about creating NPCs as well, although for this guide we're just going to be looking at monsters.) Select the monster you wish to create and then assign it up to three classes, a level and a portrait. Next select how you want it to react to other players, in the case of most monsters you'll want to set them to hostile. Finally name your creature and select where you want to keep it in your palette and you can click and drop it into the level as you would a normal monster. If you want to edit it some more right click on it in your palette list and choose edit.



Dragons are one of the biggest toughest creatures in the game.

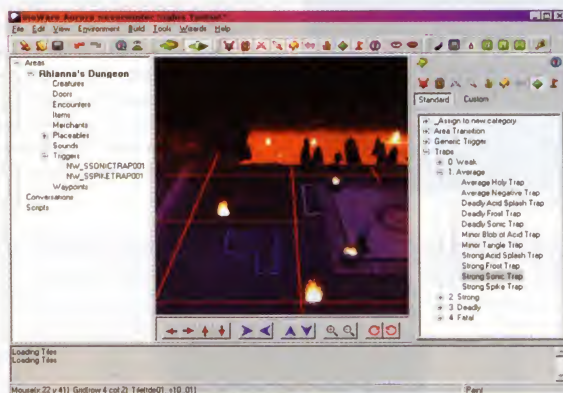
FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT

Setting up a monster encounter works in a similar way, this time using the Encounter Wizard. This allows you to select the difficulty of the encounter and the types of creature that will appear and once you've set one up it will appear in the palette in the same way a creature would. In order to transfer that encounter into your level, click on the encounter and move your mouse to the area you'd like

your encounter to occur. Again you'll get the paintbrush icon, but this time you need to draw the encounter area by dragging and right clicking a shape and then double right clicking to set it. It works in a similar way to a trap in that whenever a player goes over that area, the encounter you've set up will start.

THE WONDER OF WIZARDS

These wizards are a huge help in creating the trickier parts of your level and generally, whether you're a veteran level designer or a complete virgin modder like myself, the *Neverwinter Nights* toolset is fairly easy to get the hang of. This guide only covers



Encounters and traps both work by drawing the trigger areas directly onto the level.

the basics though, for more sophisticated instructions, for creating things such as inventories for monsters and scripting conversations for NPCs you'll need to consult the toolset part of your game manual and the Builders section of the *Neverwinter Nights* website which you'll find at www.neverwinternights.com. [X]



"For veteran level designers and virgin modders alike, *Neverwinter Nights* is fairly easy to get to grips with"

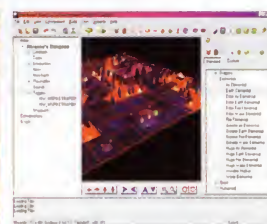
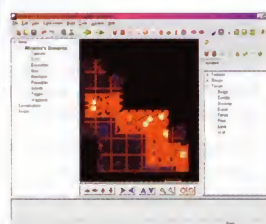
TIPS FROM BIOWARE...

HOW TO HANDLE COMBAT

There are no hard and fast numbers for hostiles within a level. Obviously, the player can handle a lot more goblins than dragons at one time. Basically, it's fun to fight groups of monsters that are much weaker than the character but only one of a similar level. A good balance to aim for: the player should finish most battles without ever being in real danger but every so often they run into a battle that requires a bit of strategy and maybe even a few attempts to finish. It's also good to give the player a bit of warning before the tougher fight. For example, if there is a long corridor with wimpy monsters, put some big impressive doors at the end. If the tough monster is behind it, the typical character will mop up the wimpy monsters and save or rest before continuing through the door.

YOU DIDN'T WANT TO DO THAT...

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN EASY LIFE, TAKE HEED OF THE FOLLOWING



1) Start simple and work up. Your dream level might be big, complex and stuffed with content, but resist the urge to start on this right away. Start by making a small area with a few creatures. Try out all of the tile sets and options. Add sounds to your tiny area, and lighting and encounters. Go for simple dialogue before writing your first plot. Basically, give yourself goals with instant gratification to start with.

2) Avoid mixing hostile and friendly creatures. If you have combat in an area with lots of friendly people, you have to think about how all of the non-combatants should react to them. Do they need to run away? Fight back? Call the guards? This is especially true with cities. If you want to have a city full of cutthroats and muggers, it's often best to keep them separate to avoid complex scripting.

3) Try to avoid having the edges of your map open by blocking them with something. It ruins the immersion to reach the edge of the playing area and run slap-bang into an invisible wall. In cities, block them off with buildings. In the forest, block them with trees or cliffs – whatever makes sense. The only place you'd leave the edge of your map open is where you're building a transition to the next map.

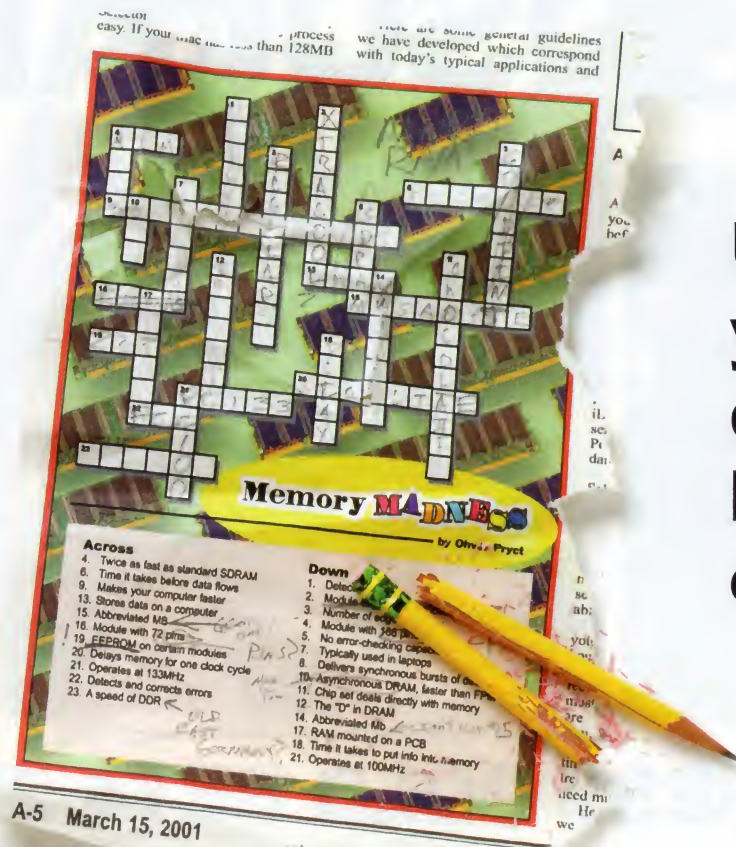
LOOK OUT FOR OUR MASSIVE COMPO NEXT MONTH!

Get practising with the *NWN* toolset because next month we're going to bring you a massive competition where you will have the chance to win huge prizes by designing the best *NWN* level. We'll be bringing you more top tips from the chaps at Bioware to help you along, and the compo is

going to be judged by us with the ten best entries winging their way to Bioware to be scrutinised by their in-house experts. They'll pick the overall winner but all ten will be featured on *PC ZONE*'s coverdiscs, which guarantees you instant fame and fortune. Well, almost.



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THE MODSQUAD

Tony Lamb goes mod wrestling



UF Gold overtakes Quake Fortress in the 'cool cannon' competition.



Knife versus flamethrower: this one's definitely going to hurt..

UNREAL FORTRESS GOLD BETA 2V8

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 69Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Unreal Tournament, patched to version 436
www.unrealfortress.com

AS THE team behind this fantastic mod says: "If you like the original *Team Fortress*, *TFC* for *Half-Life* or *Quake III Fortress*, then you'll like *Unreal Fortress*." It is, of course, essentially the same team and class-based combat idea, but mixed up and tweaked for the *UT* environment. This means that *Unreal Fortress* benefits greatly from the distinct look and feel of *UT*, which although now overtaken in our FPS affections by the likes of

AvP2 and *Medal Of Honour*, still has a fervent and loyal fanbase. This is in no small part down to the excellent bot support that *UT* players have always enjoyed, and the *UF* team have built that support into their mod, with bots that will use their own class-specific weapons and tactics to great effect.

Unreal Fortress also features the familiar nine *Fortress* classes including commando, medic, assassin and heavy gunner

among others, and these are some of the best modelled characters about – the arsonist with his flamethrower, and the blood-spattered medic are particularly effective. *Unreal Fortress* also features five distinct gametypes including CTF, Objective Assault and Escort as well as no less than 24 official maps. Many more can be found at www.planetunreal.com/mapfortress too. It's great to see this level of support for a mod.

It's also worth noting that the development team has taken great pains to point out that *Unreal Fortress* is not a clone of its namesakes. It takes the best parts of *TFC* and *QIIF*, uses them very effectively, and then rolls the whole thing up in funky *UT* outer garments to make a distinctive and very classy mod in its own right. Some people will still prefer *TFC* in particular – it's a hugely

successful and very effective mod that has pretty much set the benchmark for this kind of gameplay – but the *Unreal Tournament* variant is as vibrantly good looking, and that bot support is worth a lot of brownie points.

PCZONE VERDICT **89**
 Gives *TFC* and *QIIF* a run for their money

KILL THE KING v07

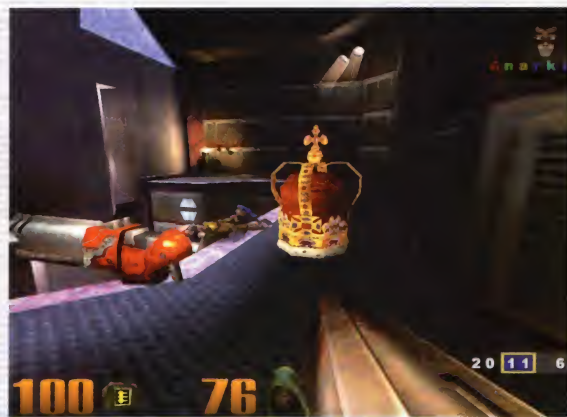
ON THE CD DVD **SIZE** 2.3Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Quake III
www.planetquake.com/fatmods/



The King model is sheer class. And a big, fat rhinestone target too. Uh-huh...

IN HIS graduation from unknown backwoods boy to the inventor of rock 'n' roll and eventual unfortunate demise as a result of one artery-clogging burger too many, you can bet your ass that Elvis Presley never envisaged being immortalised in a computer game. And yet here he is – the King – in this neat little mod that sees the wobbly superstar transformed into a sequin-encrusted target for a gib-filled *Quake* slaughterhouse. The mod's premise is simple, it revolves

around players competing to grab a randomly spawning crown. The player who gets the crown becomes the King (Uh-huh) and can then earn points by fragging the opposition. Only the King can score, so it's then up to all the other combatants to frag him, steal the crown and start racking up some points for themselves. There are a couple of other twists too, as the King is harder to kill the more players there are in a game, and if you can stay as the King for 60 seconds then you become Super-King and enjoy a period



Grab the crown and you're King baby!

of invincibility. This is a simple but fun mod using the regular *QIII* maps. There's not much new stuff, but it's damn fine fragging fun.

PCZONE VERDICT **63**
 Action guaranteed



Scientists will just sit looking confused if they're dropped mid-kidnap.

SCIENCE & INDUSTRY 0.97A

ON THE  **SIZE** 55Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Half-Life
www.planethalflife.com/si

HOLDING its head up high as one of the oldest *Half-Life* mods around, *Science & Industry* has been showing lesser add-ons how it should be done for a while now, and it has continued to evolve and improve too. The original storyline remains the same and when you join a game you choose between joining the

green (Amalgamated Fluorodynamics) or blue (Midland Carbide) teams. You then have to make your way over to the enemy base and set about kidnapping their scientists. Why? Because when each game starts you don't have any weapons, and you'll need as many boffins as you can get in order to

develop some. You kidnap the enemy's scientists, and the enemy kidnaps yours. Whoever kidnaps more gets the better weapons sooner and most likely wins. Simple.

What makes *S&I* really stand out though is the sheer quality of the maps and the addictive gameplay. There is also a raft of

clever features including some unique weapons (personal enhancements more like), and the whole mod has a classic *HL* feel about it. This is *HL*-modding at its best. It's good looking, well thought out, fun and addictive. If you've never played it then get stuck in now, and if you have played it and

uninstalled it then try a re-visit – you've probably forgotten how much fun it can be. Online support is sadly patchy, but it's great for a LAN party.

PCZONE VERDICT **84**
A Half-Life classic



S&I's new custom character skins are an improvement on the *Half-Life* originals.

MONSTER MADNESS 3.03

ON THE  **SIZE** 156Kb **REQUIRES** Full version of Unreal Tournament, patched to version 436
www.unrealtower.org

MONSTER Madness is a mini-mod – a mutator – that adds the monsters from the original *Unreal* game into any standard *UT* gameplay variant (or a new one imaginatively called 'Us Versus Them') and then allows players to enjoy the game on any map in their collection. The mutator set-up is simplicity itself with options on which monsters to fight, how many of them will appear, and how strong they are when they do. This means that you can choose to scrap it out with hordes of weak monsters, or play a more cat and mouse-style game with, say, half-a-dozen utter bastards. It's up to you. This adds a whole new feeling to virtually any game, with human vs monster matches becoming even more of a bloodbath than normal. Add in *UT*'s great bot support and you don't even need to get a network game going to enjoy some fragging, and playing some of the CTF maps as a human team against a group of the toughest monsters can be seriously hard work. It's a simple idea, and well implemented too.



Fill your levels with monsters and get fragging.

PCZONE VERDICT **69**
A new dimension for UT



Another bug with big sharp pointy teeth.

ROUGHNECKS: OPERATION PEST CONTROL v0.43

SIZE 5.5Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Quake II
www.planetquake.com/webbyte/rough

ROUGHNECKS is still at its early stages, and only time will tell whether it gets finished, but let's hope so because *Quake II* mods are few and far between these days, and this one has great potential. It's loosely based on *Starship Troopers*, with a bunch of grunts stuck in hostile territory and about to become a tasty brunch for a swarm of hungry alien bugs. At the moment it's single-player only and has limited weapons and features, but given time and maybe the development of a co-operative multiplayer mode, this could be real fun. The choice of the *Quake II* engine is a compromise – it's great for mods that need large

numbers of monsters on screen but it's also getting long in the tooth and hence decreasingly popular. Maybe if *Roughnecks* reaches completion stage in *Quake II* it will get ported into a newer game engine. For now though, start a game with "+game rough" in the command line, select a suitable map, grab your guns, and see how long you can survive. Copyright issues prevent us from putting it on the discs, but you can download it from the above link.

PCZONE VERDICT **60**
Showing promise

DISC PAGES



DISCS Mark Eveleigh
WORDS Mark Eveleigh

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08701 711 482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk BEFORE YOU DIAL... If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- You need at least a P266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on the discs. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card.
- Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only.

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

NEOCRON

CD1/DVD Pub: CDV

Leading a wave of new MMORPGs in the coming year, *Neocron* offers support to systems that don't have the power to run *Star Wars Galaxies* or *EverQuest 2*. It also contains a solid offline single-player experience for those who've not yet discovered the wonders of broadband. Set in the year 2750, *Neocron* adopts a similar style to *System Shock 2*, the predecessor to *Deus Ex*, with a comprehensive interface that

allows you to combine, modify and even construct from your inventory panel.

In spite of being designed mainly with online play in mind, this demo illustrates just how good the single-player game can be, as well as showing some of the more interesting ideas used in the game. You start having woken up from what looks like the most uncomfortable cryo-sleep ever featured in a possible future universe. Setting off, you'll

find a construction tool and a couple of other odds and sods to get you going before you meet any hostiles.

You'll soon find a metal grate blocking your path, which you can take care of by building a rocket launcher from the parts you found in the tech depot near where you start. One flight up, the familiar-looking lifts will see you in a new part of the complex where you will lose communication with your computer guide and get to make use of your arsenal for the first time. Equipped with an automatic pistol, you'll find mutant rats, bats and deformed humans after you set down here, so be sure to stock up on ammo at every opportunity in the tunnel.

Emerging from the sewers, you find yourself in another large internal complex similar to the opening corridors, only this time everything's in working order. Find the technician to get hold of a hacking device, which should help you out of the complex and negotiate as necessary. Be prepared to fight if you can't reach an amicable deal.



He's supposed to be a mutant, but he just looks hungover to us.



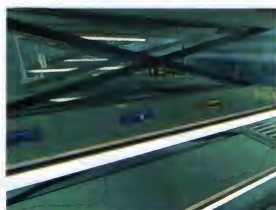
The technicians can turn on you, so watch it.

WALKTHROUGH →

The first thing you need to do, is get past that metal grate. Here's how you do it



1 After you've woken up from your cryo-sleep, head over to the airlock to your right and pick up the construction tool by the broken vent next to the main door.



2 When the computer opens the airlock, head over to the end of the corridor and into the tech depot opposite. Collect all the items from the shelves.



3 Leave the tech depot and head left, crawling under the debris and then climb the ladder at the end of the passage to the left of the airlock. Pick up the blueprints.



4 Using the constructor option from your HUD, put in all the items you picked up from the tech depot indicated on the blueprint and hit build. Hey presto!



5 Blast the metal grate open using your newly constructed rocket launcher and you're through to kick some zombie ass. The rest is down to you.

SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE

CD1/DVD Pub: Activision Reviewed: Issue 117 (89%)

Having smashed the box office, the game of the film of the comic has arrived. One of the few licensed games to appear this year with a top review rating, *Spider-Man* looks set to sell as well to gamers as the film did to Spidey fans across the globe.



Don't get caught in the Green Goblin's flash bombs or you'll hit the tarmac before you know it.

With three full levels from the game, this demo includes a city stage which will help you get to grips with web-slinging and basic combat before throwing you straight into the action underground against Shocker and his cronies. Once you've made it through the second level, there's always the Green Goblin to face in the final part of the demo and you'll need to have mastered the previous two levels before you can even think of taking him and his aerial manta ray on.

The only flaw with the game that we found when reviewing it is the annoying control system – you'll be darting from one end of the keyboard to the other constantly using the defaults. Take a hint from us: change the settings in the Options menu. It'll make your life as the wall-crawler that little bit easier.



Buff up Aunt May's silver in mid-air with your web duster.

WALKTHROUGH →

Not been bitten by a radioactive spider yourself? Better try our walkthrough then



1 The most important thing to do is lock on to the Green Goblin and avoid his initial wave of attacks.



2 Repeatedly attack the Goblin in the air using your web shooter.



3 Eventually the Goblin will come crashing down to the ground.



4 He's a tough hand-to-hand fighter though, so use your web shield as much as possible.

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

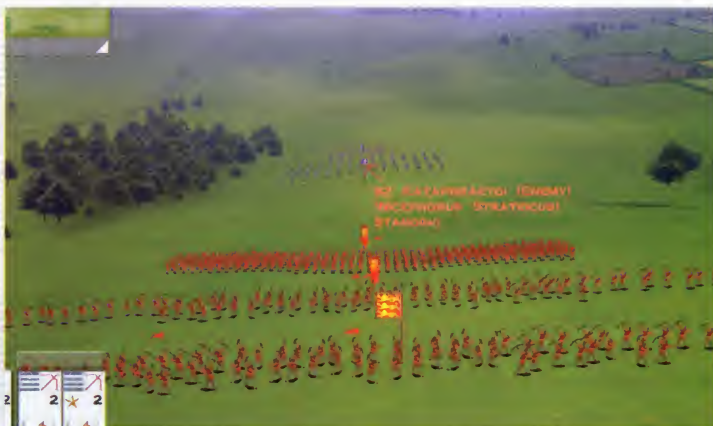
CD2/DVD Pub: Activision



If the peasants try to revolt, have them all killed. You're the boss.

Starting off in the lush surroundings of Sicily, this demo teaches you how best to command your armies in Creative Assembly's follow-up to *Shogun: Total*

War. From unit formations and tactics to rules of engagement, by the time you've finished this massive demo you should be just as well equipped as Sun Tzu when



Put your archers on a hill and use your spearmen to defend them.

the time comes to use the skills on the feudal battlefield.

Beginning with a fairly effortless tutorial on how to move your units from

place to place, things soon move on to attacking multiple units, flanking the enemy and later to establishing defences against various unit types.

TOMAK: SAVE THE EARTH AGAIN!

CD1/DVD Pub: SEED9



Watch out for the multitude of projectiles. Get hit too often, and your character will start to get annoyed.

You can blame our news editor for the appearance of this mad Korean shooter in these pages. The kind of thing you find in your local chippy, *Tomak: Save The Earth Again!* is a 2D scrolling shooter where you play – you guessed it – a decapitated head in a flower pot.

While there's no explanation for these potted craniums, the game is highly

entertaining and a must for anyone who enjoyed spending a few quid down the local arcade as a kid. As you blast more of the enemies, you can collect flower pots (these ones containing plants instead of heads) and charge up your power bar to unleash deadly moves including the Goddess' snort attack. What more could you want from a game than that?



We didn't like it, admittedly, but it may be worth a go for tennis fanatics.

NEXT GENERATION TENNIS

CD1/DVD Pub: Wannadoo Reviewed: Issue 118 (30%)

Another tennis game comes to the PC and with Wimbledon over and the rain inevitably on its way, this is the only way you're going to enjoy it without getting drenched and caked in mud before 2003.

It might not match up to June's *Virtua Tennis* demo but if you couldn't get on with Sega's title and you are on the hunt for a racket and ball simulator, you might want to give this a try.

GORE

CD1/DVD Pub: Mindscape Reviewed: Issue 118 (50%)

If you're an FPS fan and need an altogether bloodier fix, *Gore*'s here to quench your thirst before the mighty *UT 2003* arrives later this month. While it's nothing groundbreaking, *Gore* is at least distracting and can be a laugh in multiplayer. So fire up that modem and get blasting!



Gore: have you got time to bleed?



The under-slung grenade launcher. Nearly as satisfying as the shotgun

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX

CD2/DVD Pub: Activision Reviewed: Issue 118 (92%)

Containing two full levels, this demo takes John Mullins through the jungles of Colombia to the deck of the Seaward Star, a cargo tanker bound for the US with a cargo of lethal biological weaponry.

Taking on each stage with your trusty M4, the levels in this demo are two of the

most visually stunning parts of the full game. Observe the the rain hammering down onto the deck of the tanker and the incredibly detailed foliage in Columbia. You'll also experience *Double Helix*'s combination of stealth and furious action. Just watch out for those shotguns...

GLOBAL OPERATIONS UPDATED DEMO

CD2/DVD Pub: Electronic Arts

It's online and it's covert ops. Not *Counter-Strike*, but *Global Operations*, a new title from Barking Dog Studios. A combination of *TFC* and *Counter-Strike* at

its core, *Global Ops* lets you choose a class dependant on your skills, and forces you to work as a team while dealing with all manner of threats.

Teamwork is the key to piling up the bodies in *Global Operations*.



EXTENDED PLAY CD2

Return To Castle Wolfenstein
Fahrenheit Map
Aliens Vs Predator 2 Tools And Update
Aliens Vs Predator 2 Marauder Skin
Aliens Vs Predator 2 Predalien Skin
Dungeon Siege Editing Tools
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast IRG Map Pack
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast
Editing Tools Revision 2
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast
Ente's Map Pack



MOD WATCH CD2

Kill The King v07 *Monster Madness 303*

MOVIES CD2

Battlefield 1942 *Freelancer (Outside Cockpit)*
Freelancer (Inside Cockpit)

DEMOS CD2

Ricochet *Elixir*

DEMOS CD1

Michael Schumacher Racing World *Laser Squad Nemesis 1.8*

EXTENDED PLAY CD1

Aliens Vs Predator 2 v1.0.9.6 *Morrowind Bitter Coast Sounds Plug-In*
Return To Castle Wolfenstein *Morrowind Area Effects Arrows Plug-In*
Game Of The Year Pack *Morrowind*
Morrowind Entertainers Plug-In *Helm Of Tohan Plug-In*

PATCHES CD1

Counter-Strike Retail v1.0.0.5 Update *Return To Castle Wolfenstein v1.33*
Counter-Strike Mod v1.5 Update *Grand Theft Auto III*
Half-Life 1.1.1.0 *Hotel Giant*

MOVIES CD1

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero – Exclusive *The Lord Of The Rings*

ONLINE CD1

Freedom2Surf *AOL*

DVD EXCLUSIVES

THE CONTENT ON THIS PAGE IS ONLY AVAILABLE ON THE DVD EDITION OF PC ZONE. TO SUBSCRIBE AND GET A PACKED DVD EVERY MONTH, TURN TO PAGE 116

PATCHES

Counter-Strike Retail v1.0.0.5 Full
Counter-Strike Mod v1.5 Full
Tropico: Paradise Island v1.51
Europa Universalis II v1.05
Falcon 4.0 SuperPAK v3
Heroes Of Might & Magic IV 1.3
Half-Life 1.1.1.0 Full
IL-2 Sturmovik 1.1a
Laser Squad: Nemesis 1.09
Monopoly Tycoon 1.4
Star Wars: Supremacy Patch
Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza v1.02.3
Virtual Pool 3 v1.04
MechWarrior 4 Patch 3
MechWarrior 4: Black Knight Patch 1

MODS

Reaction Quake III Beta 2.0

MOD WATCH

Unreal Fortress Gold Beta 2v8
Science & Industry 0.97a

MOVIES

The Sims Online
Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness
Dragon Empires
Eve Online
GI Combat

Gothic II Teaser
Hitman 2 Teaser One
Hitman 2 Teaser Two
Iron Storm
Neverwinter Nights
Xpand Rally
Savage
Raven Shield

EXTENDED PLAY

CheatStation
Quake III: Bid For Power 1.2
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind Patch
Return To Castle Wolfenstein
Fahrenheit Map
Aliens Vs Predator 2 v1.0.9.6
Aliens Vs Predator 2: Primal Hunt
MechWarrior 4 Co-op Mod
Dungeon Siege Editing Tools
Neverwinter Nights Aurora Toolkit

PLAYABLE DEMOS

Syberia
 Point-and-click. You remember those don't you? The last few were *The Dig*, *Broken Sword*, *Myst* and the like. The genre died out with the coming of decent 3D cards in the mid-'90s, but here comes *Syberia* for those who crave some mouse action fresh from Microïds.



Pretty weapons and even prettier robotic death.

Tsunami 2265

Never averse to a bit of mech action here on PC ZONE, *Tsunami 2265* is a new project from German developer Prograph Research. It may seem odd for a German company to produce a title that is very much Japanese in style, but *Tsunami 2265* is already looking promising even in this early demo.

ESSENTIAL PATCHES

Age Of Empires II v2.0a
Aliens Vs Predator 2 v1.0.9.6
Asheron's Call v1.0.5
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn v23037
Ballistics v1.0.1
Battle Of Britain Patch 2
Black & White v1.1
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 v1.006
Championship Manager 01/02 v3.9.65
Civilization III v1.21f
Colin McRae Rally 2.0 v1.05
Commandos 2 v1.2
Counter-Strike Mod v1.5
Counter-Strike Retail v1.0.0.5
Crimson Skies v1.02
Deus Ex v1.112fm
Diablo II v1.09d
Escape From Monkey Island
Giants v1.4

Grand Prix 3 v1.13
Grand Theft Auto III v1.1
Half-Life v1.1.1.0
Hidden & Dangerous v1.3
Hostile Waters v1.03
IL-2 Sturmovik v1.1a
Jane's F/A 18 v1.01f
Jane's USAF v1.02
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast v1.03
Jimmy White's Cueball 2 v1.07
Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault v1.11
Midtown Madness 2 v1.1
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind v1.1.0605
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis v1.46
Project Eden v1.01
Quake III Arena Point Release 1.31
Return To Castle Wolfenstein v1.33
Settlers IV v2.04.1090
Soul Reaver 2 v1.02
The Sims v1.1
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 v1.01
Virtua Tennis v1.1
Warrior Kings v1.2 to 1.3

ESSENTIAL DRIVERS

Detonator XP 29.42 drivers for NVIDIA cards
Videologic Vivid!XS card drivers

FIGHT CLUB



Membership is limited to those who love to take their aggression out on others: on **PC ZONE's** servers and the **Free-For-All**.

Martin Korda has the details



Come get some. The **ZONE** boys are waiting to frag you online.

IT HAS RETURNED. The **PC ZONE Counter-Strike Free-For-All** is back, and as popular as ever. In this arena of champions, dozens of you battled with and against us for more than two hours in the most popular online shooter of all time. And once again, several of you

distinguished yourselves above all others, earning the much sought after accolade of having your name printed here, in the hallowed pages of **PC ZONE**. This month's star players were Dragon, Coldasice, Syphon UK, Flatline and TITS. Do you yearn to have your name appear

on this very page? Do you think you have what it takes to beat all comers? Then remember this date; Thursday, August 15, 2002. And get practising. We'll see you online, and if you prove to be among the best, we'll all be seeing your name on this page too. Bring it on.

FREE-FOR-ALL

THURSDAY 15 AUGUST

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Counter-Strike server

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Matthew Cheshire	Burnside
Phil Clark	Shit Kicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E.

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting to our Free-For-All Server is extremely simple. And to make things even easier still, we have given the server a permanent home. To hook up from within the game, open the *Half-Life* console and type password **pczone** and then press enter. After this type **connect ffa.zonegames.co.uk** and press enter. You will be taken right there. You can also add the server to popular game browsers such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy 3D by entering **ffa.zonegames.co.uk** where you would normally provide an IP address. If you experience any problems connecting on the night of the Free-For-All then check our forum at www.pczone.co.uk in case of any last-minute changes or information updates.

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to

Team Fortress Classic Public Server #1 – fc1.zonegames.co.uk
Team Fortress Classic Public Server #2 – tfc2.zonegames.co.uk

Quake III: Arena Public Server – q3.zonegames.co.uk

Counter-Strike Public Server #1 – cs1.zonegames.co.uk
Counter-Strike Public Server #2 – cs2.zonegames.co.uk
Counter-Strike Public Server #3 – cs3.zonegames.co.uk

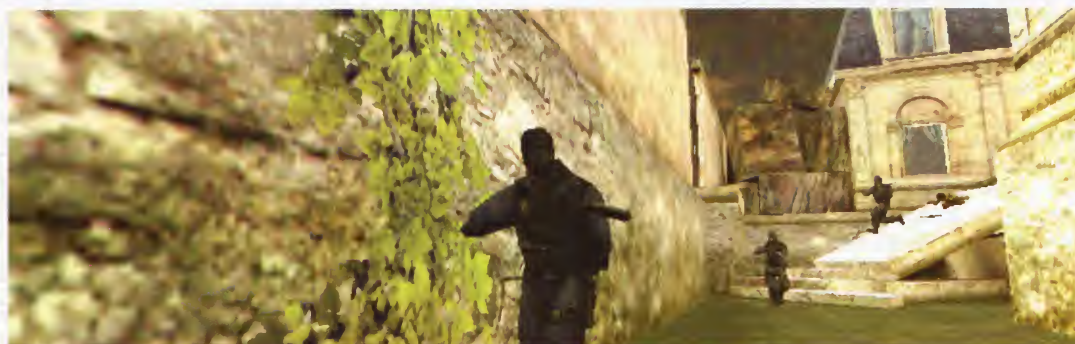
play, go to the multiplayer connection screen and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

Counter-Strike Public Server #4 – cs4.zonegames.co.uk

Unreal Tournament Public Server – ut.zonegames.co.uk

Return To Castle Wolfenstein Public Server –
rtcw.zonegames.co.uk

PASSWORD: **only**



Play with us or against us. It's up to you. But if you know what's good for you, take our side.



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- # 26,000 cheats # 2,600 downloads # Hardware guides # 500,000 users # 40 formats



MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

HOLDING COURT Dave Woods



Unreal Tournament for less than a tenner? I'll have six.

LESS THAN A TENNER

I know your piracy debate from the previous issues is sort of done and dusted, but there is something I have to point out. I just can't understand how anyone can genuinely say PC games are overpriced. About six months ago I bought *Unreal Tournament* for well under a tenner. Now I understand this may well no longer be the cutting edge of PC gaming, but for me it'll do just fine.

Visit planetunreal.com and you'll find well over 100 mods available for this game alone.

I've no idea how much gameplay lies in each one, nor can I vouch for the quality of all bar a handful, but you can safely assume I'm going to get my money's worth.

Adam Tucker

If you wait and get games when they're out as budget releases, you can get cast-iron classics for the price of a few pints. It doesn't necessarily follow that full-price games are value for money though.

JACKANORY

As a writer I was very interested in Paul Mark's letter (issue 116) on the subject of storytelling in games. My take is that game developers rarely have the skills to craft a decent

story. This leaves them with two options: 1) Hire/recruit somebody to write a decent story; or 2) Write a half-arsed effort of their own.

Think back over the games that you have played with really good stories. *Deus Ex*, *Planescape: Tormont* and *Clive Barker's Undying*. Compare this with the number of games with bog-standard, clichéd, run-of-the-mill stories and it's fairly obvious that the vast majority of developers are going for the second option.

So why don't developers make more of an effort? In an industry where polygon counts and frames per second are largely valued above all other qualities, developers are more likely to see a financial return if they invest their money in licensing the latest *Quake* engine than in employing a decent scriptwriter. It's unfortunate, but who can blame them?

I believe the only way this situation is going to change is by altering the attitudes of gamers. If they can be encouraged to look beyond technical specifications and to appreciate the value of good storytelling, then developers will have to start investing more in these areas.

Darren Turpin

We couldn't agree more and we convened a special Supertest on the subject - check out page 96.

WHAT'S THE COLOUR OF MONEY?

Medal Of Honor, *Wolfenstein*, *Jedi Knight II*, *GTA III*, *Soldier Of Fortune 2*, *AvP2*, *Max Payne* and almost any other game you can think of (with the exception of *Deus Ex*), what do they all have in common? The heroes are all white. Surely this is wrong - black people would make just as good central characters as white people; in some cases they'd be better. I personally use a skinned character for *GTA III* and guess what? He's black, and he's awesome. I'm not saying all characters should be black, but surely games should reflect the modern world.

Tom Playford-Wall

ROOM 102?

What a shame that PC ZONE fell for the Beeb's misinterpretation of Room 101 - taken from George Orwell's *1984* - as a dumping ground for things you hate. What Room 101 is about is a place where you are forced to confront your deepest, darkest fears. The place where every last bit of individuality and fight was ripped from you as last night's dinner oozed down your trouser leg and you writhed around in terrified screams.

Somehow I don't think if Winston Smith (Orwell's anti-hero in the book) had been presented with a

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new graphics card courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Blaster 4 Titanium 4400 is as good as the name suggests, and sporting the new GeForce 4 chipset, it gives you more bang than a rabbit stuffed with semtex.



Grim Fandango has a brilliant story that's good enough for an animated short.

bowl of overcooked sprouts, floating in semolina it would have had the same effect as having a cage full of viscous rats placed in front of his tasty face, with the gates keeping the rats from ripping his face off being removed one by one as he was asked what the answer was to two plus two (four not being an acceptable answer to Big Brother).

Stuart Robinson

I think I'd take the rats any day.

BUGGED TO F***

What do *GTA III* and *Morrowind* have in common? Both look great, both are freeform in nature and contain hours and hours of gameplay for the discerning gamer. Oh yes, and they're two of the most seriously bugged pieces of software I've ever had the misfortune to install on my hard drive (apart from Windows XP of course).

I bought both and was dismayed to find that they're rife with serious technical problems that virtually render them unplayable on any system you care to mention. *Morrowind* frequently crashes, while *GTA III* crawls along due to poor programming, buggy graphics, a lack of any real detail scalability and the fact that all audio is loaded from the CD.

I'm not the only one to experience these problems either. Look on any of the troubleshooting sections of the more popular forums for either of these games, and you will see posts from thousands of users – all having the same problems.

My point? While these problems will undoubtedly be resolved in a multitude of patches, why weren't we warned in your 'in-depth' reviews? You certainly had the space in your six-page review of *GTA III*. What happened? Did the programmers pay you to look the other way when you encountered these bugs, or are myself and hundreds

of other gamers merely imagining them?

Richard Davis

Problems with different hardware configurations seem to be on the increase, but it's a nightmare that the PC's been plagued with for years. Although developers try to test on as wide a range of machines as possible, they can't account for every eventuality. I played *GTA III* and *Morrowind* for weeks on end and didn't experience a single problem. Most of our



***Morrowind* is one of the finest RPGs in existence, as long as your PC's levelled up enough to get it working.**

freelancers are hooked on *Morrowind* and bar the occasional crash to the desktop they haven't either. On the flipside we've had loads of letters from readers who've been pulling their hair out trying to get either to work (and as many saying that our reviews were spot on). The good news is that patches for both have just been released (we couldn't get *Morrowind* on the CD but we'll make sure it's on next issue) which should – fingers crossed – cure most of the problems.

COMET SENSE

I was amused by Stuart's impossible dream of actually buying a PC (issue 118), and as someone who works in retail and sells this "overpriced and underspecced tat" I thought I'd strike a blow for us poor retail staff, who are

constantly being slagged by the computer press.

If you walked into the store where I work you could take home a tasty PC (yes take home, not wait for weeks, days, months or years, but take it with you). For just under a grand you can get a decent PC with a 17-in Triniton monitor, with no postage, no waiting, and all with 12 months on-site support and warranty.

Not got a grand to spare? Never mind, leave ten per cent deposit and the pay the rest interest-free over the next six

months. And while I'm getting it out of the storeroom I'll make you a brew. (Well this last bit might be an exaggeration.) So come on, give us retailers a break. You might just get a decent buy (I did) and be able to use it straight away. Now there's a thought.

Joe Brown

PS: If you don't want the extra warranty, just say no.

Well would you buy a PC from a man called Joe Brown? Just a thought...

THE NEXT BIG THING

In response to Chris Brian's letter in issue 117 concerning the accelerated rate of PC development, I must defend the companies such as NVIDIA whose efforts are so often belittled and made to seem futile.

When we, the purchasers, decide to purchase a new PC,

READER REVIEWS

FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT...

We want reviews of the games you love or the ones you hate. Each one should be between 50 and 350 words and come with a score out of 100. The best one wins a game from the current charts. Send your review to the standard mailbox address (see boxout) and remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN

PC ZONE ISSUE 112 – 82%



We Said... "You're probably wondering at this point if *SoL* is really worth all the hassle? Well overall it brings a hell of a lot to the *EQ* gaming experience."

I innocently began to play *EverQuest* about nine months ago and, along with many of my friends, contracted the plague. When I heard about *Shadows Of Luclin* I braved the real world once again to buy a copy. A few months have passed but I have to say that I'm disappointed. In the name of playability I was forced into a memory upgrade to 512Mb, twice the recommended specs. I suffer from frequent crashes and lock-ups, especially when on the moon. The new graphics are the source of great debate, as many people seem to just turn them off, and I don't use them due to problems with lag.

Ah, but there are new zones, (many beautiful but wholly unused due to transportation difficulties), a new race of cat people, a new class, a public teleportation system to and from the moon (very handy) and The Bazaar, a well-placed and exciting new trading area for players to buy and sell – currently not working, but fixable in a future patch.

OK, maybe it's mainly the sense of being unfinished that makes me disappointed in *Luclin*. It's frustrating having loads of enhancements which at the moment, just aren't usable. Although this probably means that there will be great improvements in the future, is this what we should expect from an expansion pack?

Chaanah Carr
SCORE: 50%

READER REVIEWS

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PC ZONE ISSUE 117 – 94%

We said... “If you have even a casual interest in RPGs you owe it to yourself to get your hands on a copy. This is a title that’s emerged as a contender for game of the year.”

One of the best games ever, according to the *PC ZONE* scoring system, and on a par with *Deus Ex*? I bought it on this recommendation and have to admit to being somewhat disappointed. For a start, there’s the graphics engine. It all looks pretty but if you try to move around you’ll see scenery being drawn in front of your eyes and everything freezes whenever new textures are loaded. Character animation is awful and combat seems to consist of clicking randomly with your mouse pointer. The final straw came when I was given a quest which involved researching mushrooms and collecting wild flowers from the side of a lake. I wouldn’t have minded but it took me about two hours to get there and I got lost twice and was attacked by a giant locust. I don’t know about you but I’ve got better things to do with my life. I know I’m obviously not a die-hard RPG fan, but I thought something that received 94 per cent would have been more accessible. As it is I’m going to go back to *GTA III*, and I recommend that all other sane persons do the same.

Chris Townsend
SCORE: 67%

Brilliant! Oh you want me to elaborate do you? *Morrowind* is a game that lets you do whatever you want, in a brand new world populated by weird and wonderful creatures. If you’ve ever played an online game like *EverQuest*, then this is the offline equivalent but with better graphics.

My only gripes are that it can be very slow to get from area to area, and the interface isn’t exactly designed to make it easy to do what you want. It also crashes every now and then, although not enough to make it unplayable and there’s a patch on its way that should cure that.

There are also loads of plug-ins and mods that you can add to the game to improve it or to add new missions, which means that even if you get to the end (and it’s going to be a long slog) you’ll never actually finish the game.


Paul Roberts
SCORE: 96%

we will obviously want a top-of-the-range, no-expense-spared piece of hardware, as long as we can cough up the dosh. The permanent increase in the specifications of PCs and other hardware such as graphics cards is necessary to supply the ever-looming PC consumer market with the fantastic processing power it craves.

As a result of constantly upgraded hardware, as Chris correctly pointed out, last week’s top-of-the-range gear drops in price – its value decreases as it is superseded by more advanced hardware. While this may have caused him great consternation at the time of his purchase, other buyers coming shortly after him and seeking a bargain will have been able to buy at a greatly reduced price the goodies that he himself got shortly before.

Also, while the hardware itself evolves rapidly, the gaming industry has greater opportunity to present us with more mind-blowingly good games and stunning graphics engines. As was stated in your excellent *UT 2003* preview (again issue 117), the game could be up to 1,000 times more detailed, but current hardware (or, more importantly, current consumer hardware) can’t take the strain.

Dave

And if you think *UT 2003* looks good, check out the *Doom 3* screenshot below. 

THINK LESS, PLAY MORE

With regards to Ben Calder’s letter, Sim Abuse (issue 117)... WTF? Taking the time to philosophise over whether computer characters feel pain, or whether or not we all live in a giant computer game is clearly a sign that you have too much time on your hands. Let’s carefully consider the facts and brush this sorry little subject aside before the media decide to use it as another pathetic reason to get violent games banned.

Computer game characters are created in pretty much the same way a spellchecker is; they just do what they are programmed to do. Nothing more, nothing less. (Do spellcheckers blush if you type a rude word into them?) And can you really see developers taking time out to program a character to feel pain, when they can barely get a game out that works properly?

Also, if we were all indeed part of an exceptionally elaborate computer game, then why is nobody taking the time to play it? My life is dull, nothing happens at all, my neighbours aren’t seducing each other, nobody dies in freak accidents, nothing. In short, I think the one question these philosophers should be debating is this: does anyone really care what they think?

Simon Stevens

“Do spellcheckers blush if you type a rude word into them?” Isn’t that the title of a Phillip K Dick short story?

They’re not really having a party you know, it’s just a game.



Well, isn’t it the best-looking game ever?

STAR LETTER





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PCZONE

www.computerandvideogames.com



VOTE FOR THE HOTTEST GAMES OF THE LAST 12 MONTHS

THE VOTING

The industry's biggest awards bash, **The Golden Joystick Awards**, is where **YOU**, the playing public, get to vote **YOUR** favourite recent releases into gaming's Hall Of Fame.

So what are your favourite moments? Have you made it off Omaha Beach in *Medal Of Honor* without dying, or completed *GTA III* without getting arrested or hospitalised once?

Do you think these or other recent releases rank among the finest gaming experiences ever, and that the fantastically talented developers behind them deserve some sort of medal for services to gaming? Well **here's your chance to register your appreciation** and vote for the hottest games of the last 12 months.

There are 14 award categories for you to vote in (see right), and to qualify the titles must have been released between 15.09.01 and 15.09.02. Voting is easy – simply visit www.goldenjoystick.co.uk and submit your votes.

Everyone who votes will be entered into a prize draw where you have the chance to **win FANTASTIC gaming prizes**. You could also be one of **FIVE lucky people picked to attend the awards** with a friend on October 28 2002 at the Dorchester Hotel, London, where you can see the chosen gods of the games business pick up their awards.

You can enter all or just some of the categories on the right. Make sure you have your say – vote online now at www.goldenjoystick.co.uk. Voting opens on July 8 2002.

THE CATEGORIES

- Game of the year
- PC game of the year
- PS2 game of the year
- Xbox game of the year
- GameCube game of the year
- Handheld game of the year
- Online game of the year
- British developer of the year
- Publisher of the year
- Hardware of the year
- Game innovation of the year (PC)
- Game innovation of the year (console)
- Most wanted game of Christmas 2002
- Retailer of the year

Awards are subject to change

vote online at: www.goldenjoystick.co.uk

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

MEDAL OF HONOR



It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent Opposing Force add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a PC ZONE Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 115



NEW ENTRY SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game covering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 118



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 110

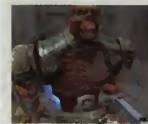


MAX PAYNE

It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.

PUB Take 2 DEV Remedy

PCZ ISSUE 107

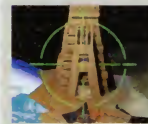


RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

A mixed bag. Visually it might be at the top of the pile, but the single-player game has been completely eclipsed by *Medal Of Honor*. Forget that and head for the multiplayer action instead, where the game comes into its own.

PUB Activision DEV Gray Matter/Nerve

PCZ ISSUE 112



UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Unreal Tournament's multiplayer mode is more than a match for *Quake III*, with a combination of well-designed maps and diverse gameplay. Single-player mode is a tad short, but it's still more of a challenge than most.

PUB Infogrames DEV Epic/Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 81



QUAKE III ARENA

Still going strong with a constant stream of mods and add-ons, *Quake III* is probably the best game for pure deathmatch multiplayer, but in terms of numbers it's trounced online by *Half-Life* and *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Activision DEV id



CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

This atmospheric shooter is one of the most unsettling we've seen and the superb graphics and sound will have you jumping like a little girl. A game that pushes the boundaries of narrative gameplay.

PUB EA DEV EALA

PCZ ISSUE 101

STRATEGY

SHOGUN: WARLORDS



Take command of enormous armies, engage in epic and bloody battles, send ninjas to assassinate generals and conquer your way through feudal Japan. This edition further improves the game's capable 3D engine, gives you greater customisation over your units and also lets you play as the Mongols. Copious in-game options never get in the way of the instant playability. *Shogun* will blow you away.

PUB EA DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 89



WARRIOR KINGS

A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.

PUB Microïds DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 114



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV DEV GSC GameWorld

PCZ ISSUE 101

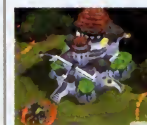


Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-ner-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb, and as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON DEV Bitmap Brothers

PCZ ISSUE 101



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWood DEV Nival Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 112



BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Liquid Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 111



AGE II: GOLD EDITION

It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *Age II* the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single and multiplayer campaigns. A great RTS.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 84



SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with classic RTS gameplay in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.

PUB CDV DEV Fireglow

PCZ ISSUE 96



SHATTERED GALAXY

This hugely involving online game combines a monthly *EverQuest*-style subscription-based role-playing experience with massive *Total Annihilation*-influenced combat. Only available from the States, but well worth the price.

PUB www.sgalaxy.com DEV Nexon

PCZ ISSUE 108

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers. Get in.

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93

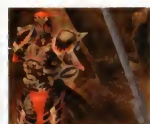
◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

GRIM FANDANGO



If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. The comic interaction between Manny and Glottis is a high watermark for scripting in games, while sublime graphics and laugh-out-loud humour ensure it's at the top of its genre. A word of warning though: it's bloody hard and if your mind doesn't work laterally you'll be playing it until the day you die.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEW ENTRY NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options along with a very accessible toolkit.

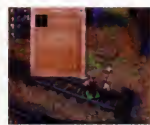
PUB Infogrames DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



THRONE OF DARKNESS

An enjoyable party-based strategic hack 'n' slash from the developers of *Diablo* sees you take command of seven samurai as they fight their way through feudal Japan. Not for everyone, granted, but worth a look.

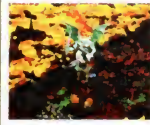
PUB Vivendi DEV Click Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 96



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and bearded of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



DIABLO II

The sequel to the definitive hack 'n' slash took all the qualities of the original into a massive world of beautifully simplistic yet compelling gameplay. With a huge online community and an excellent expansion, *DII* is as addictive as ever.

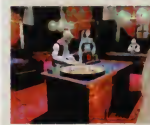
PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard
PCZ ISSUE 84



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

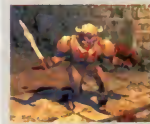
PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Infogrames DEV Perfect Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 79



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

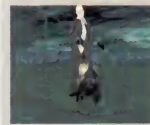
PUB Codemasters DEV Rebel Act Studios
PCZ ISSUE 98



THE NOMAD SOUL

Distinctly odd, but original nonetheless. *The Nomad Soul* is a huge intricate world populated by lap dancers and David Bowie. At turns adventure, beat 'em up and platformer, it's insanely ambitious and almost pulls it off.

PUB Eidos DEV Quantic Dream
PCZ ISSUE 83



HITMAN: CODENAME 47

Reminiscent of *Leon* and *Day Of The Jackal*, *Hitman* recreates the dubious thrill of carrying out a contract killing. Snipe from rooftops, disguise yourself in your victims' uniforms and walk away from explosions with calm elegance.

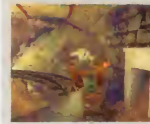
PUB Eidos DEV IO Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 98



PROJECT EDEN

Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.

PUB Eidos DEV Core Design
PCZ ISSUE 107



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 84



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

One of the hardest things to do in a game is to make your audience laugh with you rather than at you, and *Escape From Monkey Island* is undoubtedly one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in recent years.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 98



METAL GEAR SOLID

Although it's been ported pretty much identically from the console version (with a few graphical improvements), *MGS*'s tense gameplay, well-designed levels and variety of challenging bosses make it a thing of beauty.

PUB Microsoft DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Infogrames DEV Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

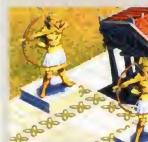
PUB VU Games DEV Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70



SIMCITY 3000

Ten years on, the offspring of the original building game *SimCity* still remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.

PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 74



ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS

Straight from the creators of *Pharaoh* and *Caesar III* comes this intricate yet hugely playable micro-management god game. Despite its slightly cartoonish look *Zeus* is highly addictive, but suffers slightly from its lack of multiplayer options and an undeveloped combat system.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions Games
PCZ ISSUE 97



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON

Design and build your own theme park and then pack it full of the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up, while trying to keep the cash and the punters coming in. From rickety wooden dippers to *Nemesis*-style, white-knuckle gunners, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.

PUB Infogrames DEV Chris Sawyer
PCZ ISSUE 75



MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.

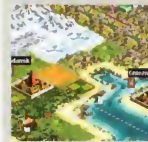
PUB Infogrames DEV Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 110



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79



CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision DEV Activision
PCZ ISSUE 98

◀ SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02



Another year, another update and yet another improvement on the greatest sports management game of all time, one that will literally consume your life. New features this time around include masked attributes (forcing you to scout for talent), updated team and player stats, and all of the new rules and regulations imposed by FIFA for the new season. Pure genius.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

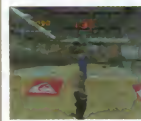
PCZ ISSUE 108



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

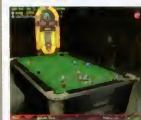
PUB Empire Interactive DEV Rowan Software
PCZ ISSUE 114



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This 3rd edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, even more interaction and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision DEV Neversoft Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 98



VIRTUAL POOL 3

Easily the best cue-based game around, *VP3* features some near perfect physics and excellent graphics. The career and multiplayer modes are highly entertaining, and a superb tutorial will have you clearing up in no time.

PUB Interplay DEV Celeris
PCZ ISSUE 99



FIFA 2002

Still the best PC football game despite some irksome flaws, this graphically improved update introduces nuances such as through-ball and one-two options, which provide greater variation but less passing accuracy.

PUB Electronic Arts DEV EA Sports
PCZ ISSUE 110

◀ MULTIPLAYER MODS ▶

COUNTER-STRIKE



Counter-Strike is the game that has completely dominated the online world for more than a year now, and its popularity still shows absolutely no sign of abating. With more servers in more countries than any other mod and a totally dedicated army of fans, *Counter-Strike* has really proved that bedroom coding is alive and well and is in better health than it ever has been.

WEB www.counter-strike.net

PCZ ISSUE 109



DAY OF DEFEAT

Currently in its second beta, this WWII-themed *Half-Life* mod is being played by more people online than both *Medal Of Honor* and *Wolfenstein*. It's atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

PCZ Issue 115



TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC

A great *Half-Life* squad-based action game with nine classes, a wide variety of weaponry and many map variations. The action focuses on infiltrating enemy bases, and the frantic gameplay requires more manual dexterity than most.

WEB <http://www.planethalflife.com/tfc>



STRIKE FORCE

Hot on the heels of *Counter-Strike* comes this superb total conversion mod for *Unreal Tournament*. It boasts outstanding maps and attention to detail, including heartbeat monitors that measure stress and infrared laser dot aiming.

WEB www.strikeforcecenter.com

PCZ Issue 109



JAILBREAK: POW

Two sides, two jails and a lot of fun. If you get fragged you get jailed and you have to stay until you're released. When all the team is in jail you get executed. All-in-all, one of the best *QIII* mods available.

WEB www.planetquake.com/bkp

PCZ Issue 109

DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.

PUB Take 2 DEV Rockstar

PCZ ISSUE 117



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cars handle beautifully. So, if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 98



RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP XTREME

This equals *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* as the top PC driving game, but the fact that it costs three times as much means it doesn't quite claim the top spot. It plays beautifully and even comes with online options. An essential rally game.

PUB Actualize DEV Actualize

PCZ ISSUE 110



MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a belter, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

PUB Microsoft DEV Angel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 96



F1 2002

This latest edition of *F1* looks and sounds better than ever, with up-to-date data, improved AI and dynamic weather effects. It's not just a brush up on the last one either as it contains added features, including telemetry for F1 obsessives.

PUB EA DEV Image Space Incorporated

PCZ ISSUE 117

FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2 STURMOVIK



Combining incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the flight stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV 1C; Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 110



MS FLIGHT SIM 2002

With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.

PUB Microsoft DEV BAO

PCZ ISSUE 111



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103



FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Infogrames DEV Microprose

PCZ ISSUE 72



B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Infogrames DEV Wayward Simulations

PCZ ISSUE 96

ALL-TIME CLASSICS ▶

THERE'S NO HANKERING AFTER THE LIKES OF ELITE HERE AS ADAM PHILLIPS SHUNS THE PAST IN FAVOUR OF MODERN(ISH) DAY CLASSICS



GOLDENEYE (N64)

Sublime. Succinct. And superior to the very good but over-weight *Half-Life*. *GoldenEye* outperforms the competition with its compact and superbly thought-out levels, perfectly-executed gameplay and powerful use of a popular franchise. This really is a classic first-person shooter.



SKOOL DAZE (SPECTRUM)

'Old' games. They may be useful for budding game designers to give them an understanding of the essence of gameplay. They may be popular with nostalgic 3D somethings, but for me, 95 per cent of gaming's golden oldies are dull, dull, dull. But I did love *Skool Daze*. And *Midwinter*. And *Flashback*. And *Tir Na Nog*. And...



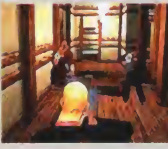
SUPER MARIO 64 (N64)

This is the game that finally made me fork out the money for a console after many, many years of dedicated PC gaming. A real joy to explore and have fun in, *Super Mario 64* proved to the world that platform gaming wasn't dead, it just needed to go 3D. Brilliant.



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS (PC)

The first successful foray into 3D squad-based strategy action games that I could actually be bothered playing. You needed brains as well as brawn to play this hugely atmospheric game. Oh, and you also needed some pretty hefty patches to get it working properly.



HITMAN (PC)

An odd choice I know. It's wretchedly flawed and convoluted in places but *Hitman*'s basic premise is simple and brilliant. The need to plan your attack is engrossing, and the execution itself is nail-biting. And it's all so morally dubious. Hopefully, *Hitman 2* will hurl the series into true classic status.



THIEF (PC)

If you put all the silly supernatural bits aside, this was one of the most tense and mouth-drying gaming experiences out there. Hide in the shadows, then silently step out and hit a guard over the head with a large black pudding. Stealth gaming had arrived. Glorious stuff.



ZELDA 64 (N64)

A beautifully rendered world to explore. An intelligent and creative approach to tackling the limitations of linear gameplay. *Zelda 64* was actually a hugely accessible 'RPG' that didn't have 'AD&D', 'complete nerd' and 'no mates' stamped all over it. A game design masterpiece.



MEDAL OF HONOR (PC)

Ahh, the beach landing. Traumatic. Terrifying. No other game has quite managed to give you a glimpse of what it must have been like to find yourself in hell. And dying. *Medal Of Honor* is a landmark in level design, as for the rest of the game though... Well, it was good but not completely brilliant.



DEUS EX (PC)

So it isn't quite as non-linear as pundits make out, the stealth elements are crap when compared to *Thief*, and the supposedly cracking characters and storylines aren't as revolutionary as some may have led us to believe. But *Deus Ex* is certainly a bold and wonderful step in the right direction.



GRAND THEFT AUTO III (PC)

I seem to recall some industry monkeyboy once bleating to me that *Grand Theft Auto* should be 2D; that the game wouldn't work in 3D. What a nob. This is life-eating, subversive and hellishly addictive stuff. And the radio stations are inspired. If your PC is up to it, you should go out now and buy it.

Reviews

Products

Info

Gadgets



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RETRO ZONE

"It was too much of a simulation for action fans to stomach"



'Nam was squeaky clean in *Seal Team*: no drugs, no madness, no bayoneting pigs.

SEAL TEAM

We love you long time

SEAL TEAM and *Apocalypse Now* have a few things in common. Being set against the backdrop of the Vietnam War is the obvious one, but they were also both firsts; *Apocalypse Now* starting a rush of inferior 'Nam movies and dodgy TV soaps like *Tour Of Duty*, while *Seal Team* single-handedly laid the template for tactical first-person shooters like *Rainbow Six* and *Operation Flashpoint*.

Those things we take for granted in games like *Ghost Recon* – such as ordering squad members to take a hill and give covering fire – were first seen in *Seal Team*. Each team member was a specialist, and if they survived their skills would improve – it wasn't easy, with panji traps and people in pyjamas trying to kill you.

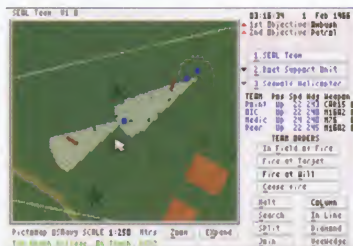
The biggest problem with the game at the time was that it was far too much

RETRO ZONE
SEPTEMBER 1993

Richie Shoemaker may have swapped changing weapons for changing nappies but he still loves the smell of lip balm in the morning

of a simulation for action fans to stomach, unsurprisingly since the game's designer, Andre Gagnon, was something of a flight sim specialist, having previously worked on games like *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat*. Organising and ordering around your men was a complicated affair, requiring more keyboard shortcuts than there were polygons on screen, and it was a power-hungry game, even for the time.

It's now largely forgotten, but there was talk of a sequel a few years back when publisher Microprose was a force to be reckoned with. And it may still happen, especially now that the Vietnam War seems to be gameworthy again, with *Hidden & Dangerous* developer Illusion Softworks working on a game called *Vietcong* and *Flashpoint* also going down a similar route.



The polygons might have been wobbly...



...but we just blamed the drugs.



The boys in Company C.

THE BEST OF THE REST →



SIMON THE SORCEROR (PC)

Well it wasn't quite *Day Of The Tentacle*, but as far as adventures go it was a perfectly fine start for the pre-*Harry Potter* wizard hero from England. The second game wasn't too shabby either, but nine years on and my goodness how things have changed.



WING COMMANDER ACADEMY (PC)

The first of the *Wing Commander* offshoots and probably the worst. Origin ripped out the ageing graphics and mechanics of *Wing Commander 2* and bolted on a simple mission generator. The fans wanted a story and multiplayer options. They got neither. Even Martin Korda was disappointed.



STREET FIGHTER II TURBO (Arcade, SNES)

It's difficult to keep up with the *Street Fighter* series these days, but this version is still regarded as the best since the gameplay is largely unchanged from regular *SF2*. There were a few new characters, some extra moves, extra clothes, but the biggest change was the eponymous turbo feature. It was a bit quick.



RAILROAD TYCOON DELUXE (PC)

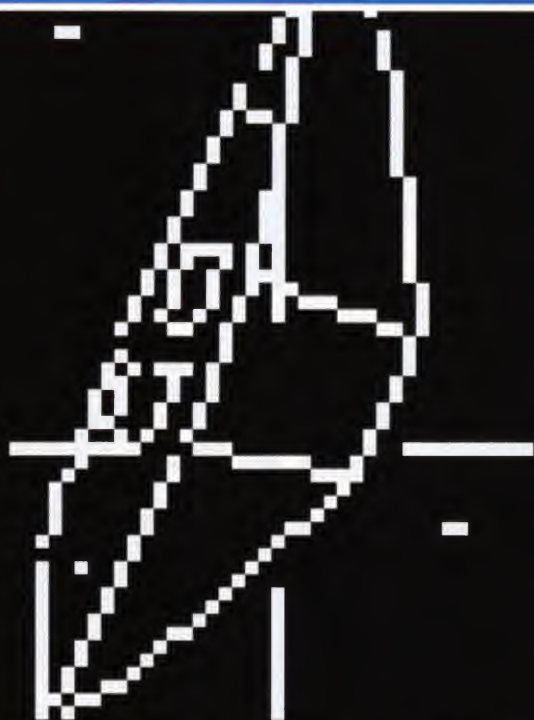
Sid Meier's original top-down strategy game *Railroad Tycoon* gets the deluxe treatment with extra scenarios and settings, enhanced graphics as well as loads more new trains, proving yet again that although they don't like to admit it, some people like to play with trains.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1993

- Commodore finally release the CD32, an Amiga 1200 masquerading as a CD-based console. It doesn't catch on.
- The last Spectrum magazine rolls off the presses as the final issue of *Your Sinclair* appears, outlasting rivals *Crash* and *Sinclair User*.
- US Gold release a CD-ROM version of *Day Of The Tentacle*, with full speech all the way through as opposed to just subtitles. CD versions of *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, *The Dig* and *Sam And Max* are announced. Who said adventures were dead?





GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

ELITE

Most games are average. A few are competent. Only one is *Elite*. Richie Shoemaker tells the story of one of the most original, important and enduring games ever made

GAME *Elite*

DEVELOPER David Braben and Ian Bell

RELEASED September 1984 (1987 and 1991 PC)

INFLUENCED Everything from *Wing Commander* to *Grand Theft Auto*. If it wasn't for *Elite* we'd probably still be playing *Space Invaders*. Not only did *Elite* define its own genre, it broke new ground in every area, from its revolutionary 3D graphics and innovative interface, to its open-ended design and the incredible detail packed into just a few kilobytes of memory.

PROFILES

While most students pour beer over their heads and piss money up the wall, David Braben and Ian Bell decided to create a whole new galaxy, then invited us all to play in it.



NAME David Braben

FIRST GAME *Elite* (BBC)

ROLE ON ELITE

Design and programming

NOW WORKING ON *Elite IV*



NAME Ian Bell

FIRST GAME

Reversi and *Freefall* (BBC)

ROLE ON ELITE

Design and programming

NOW WORKING ON "A somewhat psychedelic computer game."



NAME Chris Sawyer

FIRST GAME *Missile Command*

(MTX)

ROLE ON ELITE:

Programming on *Elite Plus* for PC

NOW WORKING ON

Rollercoaster Tycoon II

EVERYONE remembers the first time they played a computer game, be it *Space Invaders* down the local chip shop, or some variant of *Pong* on a Binatone TV system. I enjoyed both those moments, but if it wasn't for a week-long encounter with a certain BBC Micro-computer game, these moments may otherwise have been forgotten. My interest for computer games might well have ended up in the back of a musty wardrobe along with the Action Man Capture Copter.

Since its release in the summer of 1984, *Elite* has sold more than a million copies and has appeared on more platforms than perhaps any other game since. But it's the original BBC version that most have the fondest memories of, not least the game's creators, David Braben and Ian Bell, who met at Cambridge University in 1982 and began work on what was to become one of the most immersive games of its generation.

"I'd written a simple 3D space game called *Fighter* on the Acorn Atom," remembers Braben. "It was simple and pretty dull – 3D space and little else. I had found a way of doing solid 3D

shapes using line-drawn graphics, with early versions of what would become *Elite* ships. By then though, the Atom was yesterday's machine and so the game was not commercial, and in any case not finished. Ian had a BBC Micro and was working on a game called *Freefall* for Acornsoft. I changed my 3D code so that it could run on a BBC, while Ian finished *Freefall*. We had a number of very productive brainstorming sessions, from which *Elite* was born. The irony was that if I could have afforded a BBC Micro myself, I'd probably have finished and sold the fighter game, and *Elite* would never have happened."

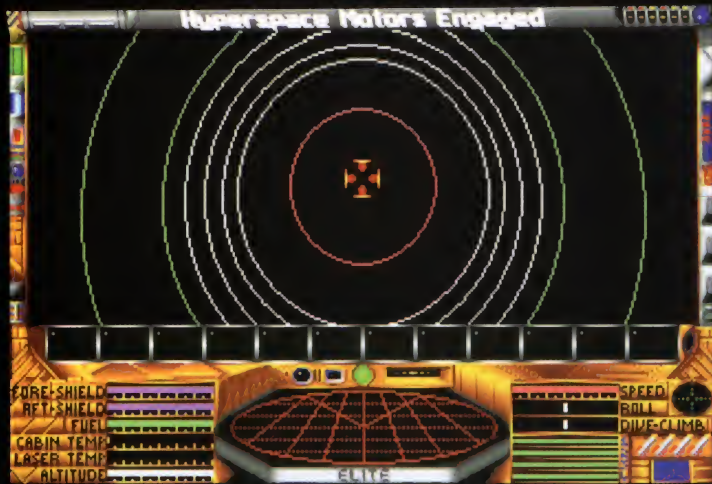
THE FIRST FRONTIER

But of course *Elite* did happen and it took two years to produce – an incredibly long time for a game back then. However, despite the incredible depth of the finished game and the technical limitations of the hardware at the time, neither Braben nor Bell can recall any significant problems during *Elite*'s development.

"The scope of what we planned seemed pretty daunting at the time," admits Braben, "but the basic idea evolved in just a couple of evenings and the rest followed during development, so at no point was anything unachievable. Despite the late nights and hard work, I thoroughly enjoyed it."

"It was fun," recalls Bell, "I was in the first and second years of a math degree and, in the first year particularly I was keeping up with the work really easily, so I had plenty of free time to work on *Elite*. Once feasibility of graphics was established it all went fairly well. The problem was having too little room to do what we wanted, not that what we wanted was too hard to achieve. It was lack of RAM all the way."

Unbelievable as it may seem today, *Elite* was made to fit into just 22 kilobytes of memory, less than a typical Word file. Into that 22k Braben and Bell managed to squeeze 8,000 planets and space stations, 20-odd types of ship, dozens of tradable commodities and ship upgrades and even a handful of missions. Perhaps



A hyper-space effect to rival *Star Trek*.

even more impressive was the fact that the game had a tangible infrastructure; with each planet having an economy, tech level and government. In agricultural systems you would buy furs or food and sell them for profit at the stations of industrial worlds. Anarchic governments would harbour pirates while corporate systems would be relatively safe, depending of course on what you were carrying in your cargo hold or whether you were wanted by the police.

THE DARK WHEEL

Considering the majority of new releases at the time weren't much more than simple arcade conversions of games like *Defender*, it was no surprise *Elite* was passed over by some game publishers. Dropped by Thorn EMI, it was Acornsoft who picked up the game and saw the potential in what the pair were trying to achieve. And with little room for a backstory to the game, it was Acorn's MD David Johnson-Davies who commissioned fantasy author Robert Holdstock to write one, *The Dark Wheel*, which was the first novella to be written for a computer game. Although the story had no crossover into the game as such, it set the tone of what was to come.

"I think the story was important at the outset. Establishing the world of *Elite*, and showing how radical the game was at the time – later on it was less significant," says Braben.

Equally as important was the groundbreaking manual. Up until then instructions were little more than cassette inlay cards, but *Elite* offered a *Janes'* style guide that offered not only instructions as

"The magazine reviews were all ecstatic, so we knew we'd made it creatively"

IAN BELL
CO-CREATOR OF ELITE

to how to play the game, but information on the political structure of the 8,000 worlds in the game, as well as a history of the ships themselves. It was a brochure of riches that players could aspire to and much of the myth that has grown up around *Elite* comes from the documentation, such as the mythical Generation Ships, secret missions and Rock Hermits.

JOIN THE ELITE

Elite was finally completed for the BBC in the summer of 1984 after months of testing and tweaking and both Braben and Bell were well aware they were breaking new ground.

"It was a rebellion against the games available at the time," says Braben. "I found them pretty boring. *Elite* was the first free-form game – the

remembers Bell. "Feedback was almost all positive apart from some maliciously gleeful crackers. Some people objected to the unreality of dust-not-stars and massively fast planet rotations but that didn't bother me at all since I knew realism would have played worse."

Braben says: "The first time I appreciated the scale of the game's success was seeing a room piled high with competition entry cards – neatly sorted into bundles of 100 – and each of these had reached 'Elite' or 'Deadly' representing hundreds of hours of someone playing the game."

A SPACE ODYSSEY

Up until *Elite*, to fly a spaceship in a game meant having to save the universe from relentless marauding aliens. Science fiction games in the early 1980s were as clichéd and banal as sci-fi films were in the 1950s, and just as Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey* challenged filmmaking, *Elite* was to have the same effect on games.

Apart from the 3D graphics, *Elite* did more than enough to give you the feeling of existing within a living, breathing universe. No longer were you at the centre of things, you were just like everyone else, trying to get along in a harsh environment.



Some were out to kill you, while others neither cared or bothered with you. Not only was it up to you how you progressed, but the game allowed you to measure and pace your own progress. The greedy could accumulate wealth through trade, the altruistic could hunt pirates for a bounty, the explorers could mine and criminals could break the law just for fun. As much as *Elite* was a space combat game, it was also a role-playing one that remains as intriguing as any goblin-infested dungeon.

LOST IN WITCH SPACE

The BBC Micro – physical dimensions aside – wasn't the biggest games machine around and it was logical that *Elite* should move onto other platforms. Bell and Braben kept working on the game, turning out versions for the Electron, Commodore 64 and Apple II. Other teams were drafted in to handle other conversions and in 1987 it was finally the PC's turn to get an *Elite* of its own, coded this time by Real Time Software, most famous for *Carrier Command*. But by then the Braben/Bell partnership was coming apart and pressure was building for a true sequel.

"I had very little input on the conversions we didn't do ourselves," says Bell. "We weren't involved in the PC version as at the time I felt that the game would be implemented easily on such powerful machines and it would be best to let the programmers who know the machine get the most from it."

"After *Elite I* was on a real high," recalls Braben. "We did do some work on an abortive sequel but to be honest, the problem was all the other versions we had to think about."

Bell agrees, although maintains it wasn't the sequel that was the problem, but the difficulty in moving to new hardware: "In a way *Elite* was never really finished because one version followed another. We were fully under way on 6502 (8-bit) *Elite 2* and I put a lot of work into that. Only when it became clear that 6502 was not the future and we had to jump to 68000 (16-bit) did I bail out."

PLUS AND MINUSES

In 1991, seven years after the release of the BBC original, the final round of *Elite* conversations were launched; one

for the Acorn Archimedes – widely regarded as the best version of the game, one for the Nintendo Entertainment System – coded by Braben and Bell, while the job on the newly-updated PC version, dubbed *Elite Plus*, fell to Chris Sawyer – who was soon to find fame on *Transport Tycoon*.

"I think I'd only seen *Elite* once before that time, and that was on a BBC Micro many years before," remember Sawyer. "To be honest I didn't think much of it originally, but then I hadn't played it."

"The brief was to basically update the original PC wire-frame version of *Elite* with new filled-polygon EGA/VGA graphics and add some new features David wanted in the game."

"*Elite Plus* was little more than a remake," admits Braben. "Chris Sawyer did a great job, nonetheless. And it's one of the series of which I am still very fond."

In October 1993 the game finally got the sequel the fans were craving for, although not the one it deserved, *Frontier: Elite II*, designed and programmed by Braben for the ST and Amiga and converted to PC, again by Chris Sawyer. For a great many fans it was a disappointing game; a sprawling epic that was a million times bigger, too complicated and not very much fun. Another sequel in the same vein followed in 1995, *Frontier: First Encounters* (aka *Elite III*), though this time the game was released unfinished by publisher Gametek, a move that would sully both Braben and *Elite*'s great reputation.

"The publisher support and nurturing that *Elite* received was never given to the sequels," says Braben. "They were rushed out in comparison, and suffered as a result. Nevertheless I am very proud of *Frontier: Elite II*."

THE NEW FRONTIER

Despite having fallen out and gone their separate ways since *Elite*, both Braben and Bell remain proud of the original game and realise that without the other, *Elite* wouldn't have been the durable game it was.

"Working together is frequently more than the sum of the two," says Braben. "We bounced ideas around and *Elite* grew to be great as a result. We each knew the whole code pretty intimately. I don't think



Stunning real-time 3D graphics. Just look at it.

there were any particular strengths or weaknesses between us, although Ian wrote an amazingly complex and sophisticated set of tactics routines."

Bell says: "David was a competent and industrious coder, he was also more business minded. We were both creative, but he was coming at programming from an electronics direction and was stronger on hardware issues. I came at it from a mathematical direction and handled most of the speed-critical stuff."

So why is it that nearly 20 years later, *Elite* has yet to be bettered?

"Relative comparisons can be divisive. Games in other genres have bettered *Elite*, but few have come close for the same style of game. I believe *Frontier*:

Elite II managed to deliver much more than *Elite* – it just didn't cut it in the fun of the combat," says Braben.

Chris Sawyer adds: "I think many games nowadays are designed from the outside in, so the look, feel, interface, and 3D engine take priority, and then the game logic is bolted on last. *Elite* and *Elite II* were the other way round; they centred on a complex physics engine and universe simulation, and the visuals were designed around the gameplay. This meant they had incredible depth. You never quite knew what you'd find next, or whether there were other features you hadn't yet found in the game. Most games can be 'completed' – the *Elite* games can just go on and on." [E]

"The irony is that if I could have afforded a BBC Micro *Elite* would never have happened"

DAVID BRABEN
CO-CREATOR OF ELITE

THE FUTURE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

BRING ON THE ELITE

After two increasingly disappointing sequels, it is with some relief that *Elite IV* will mark a return to *Elite* of old. Braben again is at the helm, though aside from a simpler flight model and the promise of a full range of multiplayer for the first time, little else is known.

"*Elite IV* is really starting again, in many senses," says Braben. "It is our plan to try and deliver the delight of *Elite* in the current jaded games business. I'm afraid it is still a long way off. Open-ended games are a nightmare to write. Even the slightly open style of *Zelda* caused Miyamoto and Nintendo huge problems, and it slipped badly."

In the meantime, Braben has very high hopes for Microsoft's *Freelancer*, which is set to launch this November.





COMMENT

Everyone likes to wave an angry fist when games are too short. Except **Mark Hill**, that is. He starts wringing his hands when he finds one that's too long

"Spare me the ten-minute cut-scene where you just sit back and listen to badly acted dialogue"

I CLEARLY HAVE too much time on my hands. Having already completed *Medal Of Honor* and *Jedi Knight II* in recent months, I've just laid *Soldier Of Fortune II* to rest. And they were all far too long. It's quite common for games to get criticised for being too short if you reach the end thinking, "is that it?" But surely it's just as bad if you get halfway through and think, "you mean there's more?"

I usually complete all first-person shooters that are any good, and by the end I invariably feel empty and unfulfilled. For every great level or set piece there are hours of dross repetitiveness, which you only play through because there might be something good after it. If only there was a fast-forward button on my mouse.

Spare me the ten-minute cut-scene where you just sit back and listen to badly acted dialogue. To hell with yet more corridors that look exactly like the ones you've just cleared. There's nothing worse than playing a level, thinking: "This must be the end," only to find that there's plenty more to come. Even if you've loved every minute you begin to feel there's more to life than killing another camp full of Nazis or dismembering half the male population of Russia.

But because skill largely determines how long you'll be playing a game before you complete it – they can't have a running time at the back of the box like films do – we never really



Soldier Of Fortune II: too damn long. Keep 'em short, sharp and snappy.

know how long we're in it for. It's not like with a CD, which tells you how many tracks there are, or with a book, where it's completely straightforward to judge the length of it. Pick up *In Search Of Lost Time* (clocking in at more than 3,000 pages) and you know you'll have to give up the next two years to finish it. Proust has nothing on BioWare though, whose *Baldur's Gate II* has more than 200 hours of gameplay. I played it night and day for two weeks and then gave up in exasperation. Then they released an add-on pack that lasted longer than most full titles. (Notice that I'm talking about great games here, because they're the only ones I feel the urge to complete.)

But with very few exceptions, great games that make me want

to keep playing even after I've written about them are always too long. Yet I feel compelled to carry on in order to get that sense of completion you feel when you've turned the last page of a book or seen the credits roll at the end of a film.

The problem is tied in with another industry woe: overpricing. Because games are so ridiculously expensive, publishers feel they need to give punters their money's worth. But wouldn't it just be easier to spend less time and money developing extra hours of needless gameplay and so be able to reduce the price of the final product? By the way, anyone wishing to enter the All-England Summarise *Baldur's Gate II* Competition, write to the usual address. **PCZ**

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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Pterodon/Illusion Softworks

PUBLISHER Take 2

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE October

WEBSITE www.illusionsoftworks.com

IN SUMMARY

A squad-based FPS set in the Vietnamese jungles where you lead an elite team of soldiers through 20 missions and use all manner of realistic weapons, including M16s, grenade launchers and sniper rifles. There will be a developing story and the gameplay will concentrate on clear-headed tactics as much as on bloody action.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

It's the war everyone's been waiting to play from the creative minds behind *Hidden & Dangerous* and, er... *Flying Heroes*. The fact that it's being developed by a Czech company should ensure this isn't some kind of Vietnamese *Soldier Of Fortune*, and the end result will hopefully be more *Platoon* than *Rambo*. Plus the multiplayer mode will allow you to take charge of Vietcong forces against US soldiers.

VIETCONG

War is hell, but this could be one hell of a game

■ SMELLING NAPALM Mark Hill



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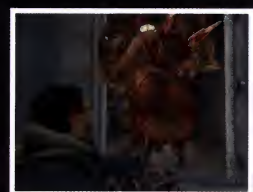
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